NF

ISSUE #54:
TURTLE POWER!

INTERVIEW:
KEVIN EASTMAN
CO-CREATOR OF THE
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

WARIOWARE:
GET IT TOGETHER!

NINTENDO SWITCH
(OLED MODEL)

TURTLES
THROUGH TIME

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA:
SKYWARD SWORD HD

MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2:
WINGS OF RUIN

MARIO GOLF:
SUPER RUSH

THE GREAT ACE ATTORNEY
CHRONICLES

BLASTER MASTER ZERO 3

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES:
RESCUE-PALOOZA!

SEPTEMBER 2021

SUBSCRIBE TO BLOOB3RRY!

ON THE OPPOSITE extreme of the video game fandom from fixed, unmoving, printed magazines like this lies the world of livestreamed video, constantly in motion. You wouldn't think that there would be much common ground to be found between the two, and yet NF seems to have attracted the attention and admiration of a Twitch streamer or two! The newest friend of the Force in the Twitch world is someone you should get to know: Bloob3rry!

A.K.A. Melissa, A.K.A. Mel, A.K.A. just Bloob, Bloob3rry is a variety streamer who plays games across all platforms. Her interest in one particular Nintendo classic seems to have cemented her support for our publication, though: the GameCube masterpiece Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door. We printed art from that 2004 hit on the reverse side of the wall poster included with print copies of our July/August 2020 issue (with Paper Mario: The Origami King on the other side of the poster, as well as that issue's cover). Bloob loved it so much that she had it framed and hung right behind her so it's visible when she streams, and beyond that she also has taken to Twitter multiple times to encourage her followers there to subscribe to our magazine too!

That kind of kindness deserves reciprocation, so this is our call to you, our magazine readers, to subscribe to her Twitch channel! Tune in on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights, chat with Bloob's community, become a part of it yourself and maybe even toss some Bits her way as an extra thanks for embracing our humble magazine (literally) here in an age when print media is certifiably old-school. And tell her that NF sent ya! **— LUCAS**

Twitch.tv/bloob3rry

CONTENTS

INBOX
4

NEWS
8

DOWNLOAD
14

COMICS
7, 33, 60,
64, 81

FEATURES
34

PREVIEWS
45

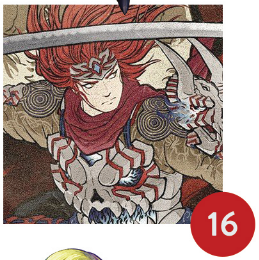
RETRO
55

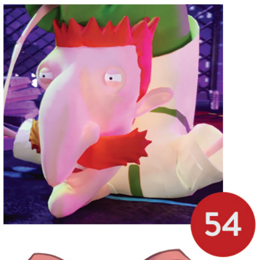
INTERVIEW
61

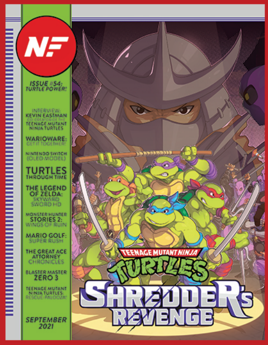
REVIEWS
65

COMMUNITY
78

NEXT ISSUE
82







ON THE COVER

Stepping out of the shadows and into the spotlight, it's everyone's favorite DNA-altered adolescent weapon-wielding reptiles, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles! The TMNT have not had a major new video game release worth getting excited about in several years, but now that the new Shredder's Revenge is on the horizon, this was the perfect time to give Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello and Raphael their first appearance on an NF cover. And Shredder as well, of course, looming large!

INBOX

COWABUNGA!

Sing along with me! You know the words!

"They're the world's most fearsome fighting team! They're heroes in a half shell, and they're green! When the evil Shredder attacks . . . "

Wait. That hasn't happened for a long while. The Foot Clan fled. Krang went back to Dimension X. And Shredder himself hasn't tried to whip up a fresh batch of turtle soup in, what, nearly seven years? Not in the context of a Nintendo system video game, any way.

But you can't keep a good villain down (even by dropping him into the back of a garbage truck), so we'll soon see what nefarious plot old tinhead's been cooking up throughout this latest era of absence. It's nearly time for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge!

This all-new take on the oldest toon Turtles is set to ignite a major explosion of TMNT nostalgia soon, and we're here to do our part in amplifying that impact. So this edition of Nintendo Force features a full focus on the four famous Foot-kicking ninja brothers, bringing them back into their rightful place of standing in the Big N's spotlight. Because though their video game adventures have been a bit inconsistent in the past two decades, there was a time when TMNT was a brand just as important to the NES as Mario, Zelda or Castlevania!

We'll explore the full history of Nintendo system Turtles titles in our central feature, Turtles Through Time. We'll give you a Shredder's Revenge preview that will instantly inspire you to throw a pizza party. And we're incredibly honored by the star of our Interview section this time around: Kevin Eastman, the man who actually first dreamed up the Ninja Turtles! He and Peter Laird co-created the first TMNT comic series that all other Turtles media sprang out from. There would be no TMNT games without him!

So please enjoy NF #54: Turtle Power! And save me a slice of pepperoni, won't you?

Lucas M. Thomas

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #53: JULY/AUGUST 2021

We supported the port of Skyward Sword by sending this big-billed bird soaring to our subscribers, and every piece of feedback has been positive! Perhaps the enduring legacy of this particular Legend will be a bit less divisive going forward, now that its HD re-release has elevated some of its prior low points. For more, read our review in this issue on Page 74!

Now, Player's Poll time! Let's talk Turtles. We first asked who among the core four is your favorite: Leo, Mikey, Donnie or Raph? And why? Then we wanted to know what your point of entry was to the TMNT franchise. Did you first experience one of the shows? Or did you get introduced to them by way of a comic or a movie? (Or a live rock concert!?) Finally, we requested stories of your experiences playing TMNT video games over the years. Here are just a few submissions:

LETTERS

My son Milo and I read your magazine every issue, so we're both going to answer your questions:

QUESTION #1
MILO: Michelangelo, because he's always ready for a party, and he uses my favorite weapon.
DAD: Donatello. His most important weapon is his brain.

QUESTION #2
MILO: The old cartoon from when my Dad was young. The 2012 Nick show is my favorite.
DAD: The '80s cartoon for sure. I was born in 1980 so I was the perfect age for it when it launched. Still my favorite.

QUESTION #3
MILO: At the barber near our house there is a TMNT arcade game that I like to play, and Turtles in Time on the SNES.
DAD: I played the early arcade games when they were new, and I have great memories of playing them with my friend Jon at a bowling alley near where I grew up.

Thanks! **— MILO & HIS DAD**

I love all the TMNT for different reasons, but my favorite *has* to be Leonardo. As a kid I liked him because blue was my favorite color and katanas are awesome, ha ha, but now I really appreciate his level head, his courage and his "big brother" qualities. The other Turtles have more "character," sure, but the serious Leo deserves some love, too! **— TOM M. (GAMETOM)**

Raphael is my favorite Ninja Turtle because we're both a lot alike: We're both very passionate and we have a short fuse to an explosive temper.

I became a fan after seeing the animated series from 1987, which I still love. However, my favorite incarnation would have to be either the original comics, the Last Ronin series or the IDW comics. However, I love pretty much all of them . . . except for the Michael Bay movies. **— TRAVIS B.**

Michelangelo is my absolute favorite Turtle. What's not to love about a real party dude who loves pizza and comic books? I also loved his weapon of choice in the nunchakus.

I was introduced to the TMNT universe via the '80s cartoon series when I was a wee Nintendo nerd. I enjoy reading the IDW series in the present, but I feel the very first TMNT movie was the best: Shredder was a real threat to the Turtles and Splinter. Plus, I really love the darker and grittier feel that the movie has.

Lastly, I loved and still love playing the NES trilogy of games. I remember the first TMNT NES game being really hard and I've only ever gotten past the dam level twice! My favorite of the trilogy is still TMNT II: The Arcade Game. I've spent hours playing this game alone, though Manhattan Project has a fond place in my heart, too.

Here's to many more years of TMNT to come! **— ENEIGDRA REESE**

As a fan of the comics, I favor the 2003 show. That series was the closest in

VOID IN QUEBEC AND MEXICO

I tried – and wasn't wowed by – the first game on NES, but played the heck out of the arcade game (although, I couldn't redeem the free pizza coupon in Quebec) and beat it on my own. Later, my friend got The Manhattan Project for his birthday and we spent a rainy weekend pushing though to beat that. Earlier this year, my sister and I got together on a Saturday, sat on the carpet in front of the CRT in the game room and had a blast with The Manhattan Project.

I've always been a fan of Turtles in Time, and I'm happy to say that my son and daughter love playing it on SNES or arcade. The music is awesome, and throwing enemies into the screen never gets old; we've beaten Shredder together many times.

Every now and again, I'll run through Fall of the Foot Clan (first GB game I ever tried after my cousin got the handheld) and Back from the Sewers on Game Boy, and Radical Rescue is a gem of a Turtles game with a surprising amount of depth that any Turtles fan should really play!

All this to say that my sister, my nephew, my kids and I are so amped for Shredder's Revenge. After seeing what was done with Streets of Rage 4 (and many, many hours invested later), I have every confidence that the magic will be captured to make this a worthy follow-up to what Konami brought us before! **– SHAYNE**

story and in spirit to the comics. It's the only one that has any real serious undertones as well. There are aspects of the newest series that I enjoy (I love their version of Karai), but it's clearly meant for kids. Not that that's a bad thing, just that, being almost 35, I enjoy the 2003 version more. **– ALI A. AL-RAJHI**

Hello! I was a little older than the target age group for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles when they first became popular, so my real introduction to them came when all the boys at my son's preschool became obsessed with them. Because Andrew's favorite color was red, Raphael was definitely his favorite Turtle. I switched roles between playing a supporting Turtle and being the villain. Unfortunately, the TV show was a little too intense for us at the time, so we mostly read the Easy Reader books. We haven't played a TMNT video game before, so we're looking forward to trying the new one. Thank you! **– STEPHANIE**

My favorite is Michelangelo, because his name is close to mine. Also, he was the funniest of the Turtles in the live-action movies from the '80s.

My introduction to TMNT was the original cartoon – and that's also the best iteration. I mean "Heroes in a Half Shell, Turtle Power!" says it all, right? I bet that theme song is stuck in your head now, isn't it?

I remember as a kid being extremely frustrated by the original NES game, even with the NES Game Atlas from Nintendo Power. And that dam stage was nearly impossible! Don't think I ever actually beat that one. I remember liking the arcade game better for the beat-'em-up style. **– MICHAEL SCORZETTI**

Donatello is the best Turtle, for two reasons: First, in some video games he has the longest reaching weapon (I'm looking at you, original TMNT for NES); second, growing up as a geek, his personality and tech know-how resonated with me.

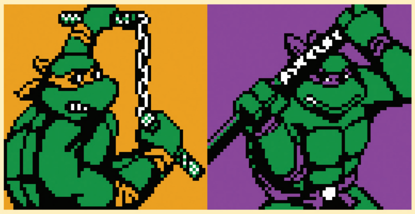
My introduction to TMNT was the fantastic '80s/'90s Saturday morning cartoon! I've also had a special place in my heart for the original live-action movies. For some reason, despite its bad reviews, I was really drawn to the third one. Call me a sucker for time travel movies, I guess!

I've totally beaten the original TMNT for NES! *(Ignore the Game Shark connected to the cartridge . . . dang seaweed level!)* **– ANDREW GAULRAPP**

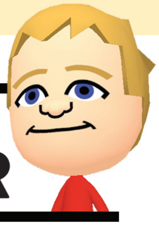
I'm Team Donnie all the way! Donatello has always been my favorite Ninja Turtle since I was a kid, because he's the smartest and geekiest one. Just like Donnie, I have always had a love for math and science, not to mention his weapon (bo staff) was the easiest to mimic. I would grab the broom in my house and pretend to fight the Foot Clan along with Donnie!

My introduction to the TMNT was the 1987 animated series, because well, I'm an '80s kid! That intro was, and still is (in my opinion) the best! I still put it on YouTube and sing it to my 2-year-old daughter, ha ha. I also remember going to the theater and watching all three of the live-action TMNT movies, which were pretty good (two out of the three). But for me, the '87 animated series will always hold a very special place in my heart, and therefore that's still the best TMNT adaptation. **– JAVIER BRIONES**

We got many, many more messages professing preferences for each Turtle, but the two that were mentioned the most by far were Mikey and Donnie. Congrats for being the NF family's faves!



CARTER'S CORNER



The answer to my question from last time is . . . Evil Eagle! That's my favorite boss from The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening.

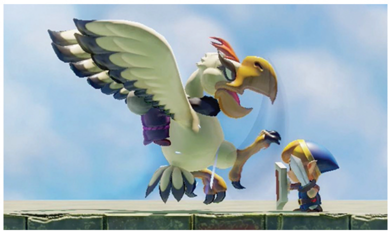
And speaking of Zelda, this Carter's Corner is about my new game: The Legend of Zelda: Monopoly Party! (Obviously, it's just Monopoly, but Link style.) I've been making it myself.

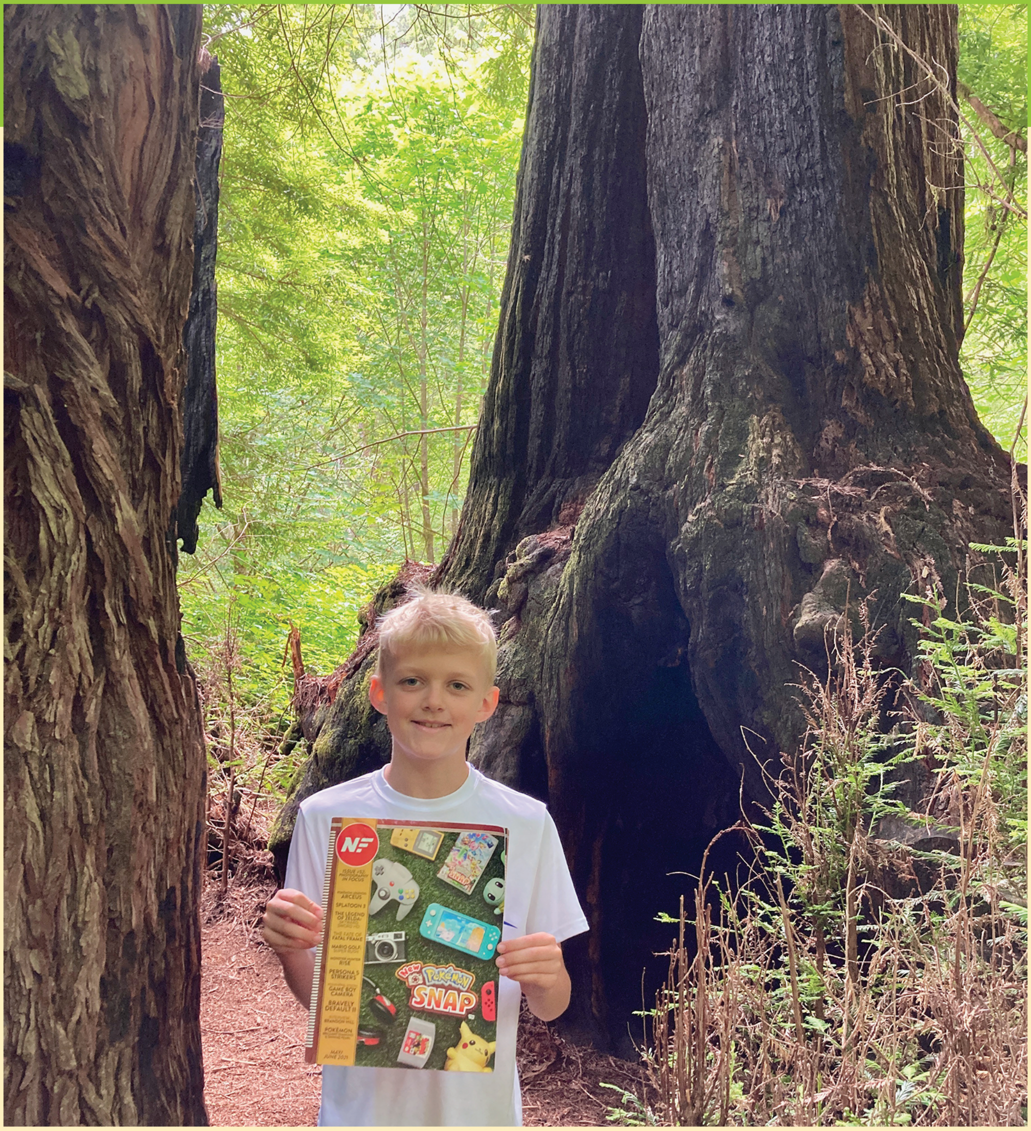
The playing pieces are Link, Zelda, Kaepora Gaebora (The owl. Who would dare switch him out for a person?) and Fi.

The spaces are different, too. There are no utilities, tax spaces or Community Chest. Instead, there are four "Link/Zelda/Gaebora/Fi gets $50" spaces, a mid-boss battle space and two extra Chance spaces! My Dad landed on Chance eight times when we played, and went to Jail twice!

And every time you pass Go, a boss lands on the board to block your way. When you reach them, you can't move any farther until you beat them. Roll a certain number to beat them. Whew!

A couple years ago, I beat Ultimate Challenge 3. Last June, I beat Ultimate Challenges 1 and 2. So, quiz time! What game am I referring to when I say "Ultimate Challenge?" See you later!





TRAVELING TO TOWERING TREES

In response to the call for photos we sent out at the end of our New Pokémon Snap issue, NF fan Logan Moody took his copy of that same edition along to California's Redwood National Forest. Wowza!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Shayne**, **Stephanie**, **Eneigdra Reese** and **Milo & His Dad**, the four winners of our TMNT Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some Dread-ful questions!

QUESTION #1

The incredibly powerful new E.M.M.I. enemies stalk Samus in Metroid Dread. What's the scariest foe you've ever run away from in a video game?

QUESTION #2

Were you aware of the long development history of Metroid Dread before it was revealed to finally be coming to Switch?

QUESTION #3

Lots of players are scrambling to catch up on Samus' history now that Dread's on its way. Have you played the previous "mainline" Metroid games?

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #55" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a copy of the new Metroid Dread!

NINTENDO FORCE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas
@NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Evan Campbell
@evancampbell
Jonathan Holmes
@NonTrotski
Kevin Knezevic
@kevknez
Maggie Jones Lutey
@AvengerMags
Brett Martin
@NightramVGMM
David Oxford
@LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford
@nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce
@megaStryke
Kris Randazzo
@GeekadeKris
Rebecca Rudranath
@strawbecky_81

STAFF ARTISTS
John-Charles Holmes
@Sonic9jct
Lindsey Layne King
@LuminousLungKey
Matthew Loffhagen
@kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto
@MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson
@thormeister1971

CONTRIBUTORS
Zoey Handley
@adzuken
Carter Thomas

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NEWS

OLED Leads the Way

The next revision of the Nintendo Switch has finally been revealed!

TWO ISSUES AGO, we reported on three new rumors regarding features of the next revision of Nintendo's Switch hardware.

One of the three was true.

The Nintendo Switch (OLED model) – that's its name, including the parentheses – is set to launch on October 8, hitting store shelves on the same day as Metroid Dread. Its big new feature is a bigger built-in screen – whereas the original Switch units had screens that measured 6.2 inches diagonally, this update bumps up the screen real estate to the 7-inch mark.

In addition, the new screen is made using OLED (organic light-emitting diode) technology. This tech has been used in new televisions for the past several years, so you may have seen it in action already or even own one yourself – it's a display technology that outclasses older screen types by offering richer colors and better contrast, particularly when it comes to the deep black levels it's capable of. You'll have to go eyes-on with a unit yourself to be able to see the difference directly, but games should "pop" like never before on the OLED Switch.

Other features included with this new system: a LAN port built into the redesigned dock, a much wider kickstand that instantly outshines the shrimpy little flap of plastic featured on the original model and a promise of enhanced audio while undocked too.

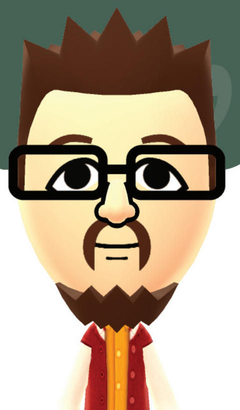
Other features *not* included with this new system: anything having to do with improving the display ability in TV Mode, like the rumored 4K output that, for now, will remain just a rumor.

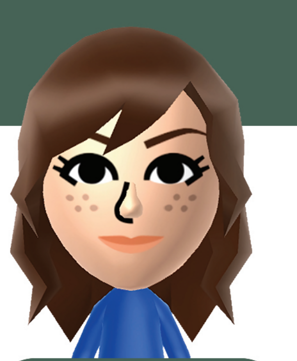
Gamers have reacted to the reveal of the OLED Switch with the usual mix of positivity and outrage, and those who are choosing anger are mostly the ones who've been holding out hope for a true "Switch Pro" that would bring the Big N into the world of 4K. Or at least improved processing power to give a boost to existing games that run sluggishly on the standard Switch.

Those upgrades may still come in another future Nintendo Switch model – or the successor to the Switch generation, if that ends up being named differently. For now, the Nintendo Switch (OLED model) is arriving as more of a mid-generation refresh along the same lines as the Game Boy Advance SP or Nintendo 3DS XL.

In fact, considering that the 3DS family of systems ended up having six different models before its end, this third style of Switch might only mark the halfway point of its run!

> As someone who plays Switch in TV Mode about 95% of the time, this portable-focused upgrade might not be a must-buy for me, personally. But if you or someone else in your household is a handheld player primarily, that bigger, brighter OLED screen is going to be an enticing enhancement to be sure. – **LUCAS**





> "I stayed up past 2 a.m. to watch Falcom's anniversary concert live, so you can probably guess what my excitement level was after this news was revealed! As a Trails fan, I never thought we'd see official translations for the Crossbell games, but because the series is so interconnected, it's been a big void not to have them. With this news, we can rest assured that we'll have the full Trails experience. And hopefully my patience can hold out to 2022 and 2023!?" – **MAGGIE**

TRAILBLAZING TRANSLATIONS

NIS America is officially partnering with fan translation team The Geofront.

JUNE 24, 2021 will forever be a date etched into the hearts of fans of Nihon Falcom's Trails series.

On that day, during a livestreamed 40th anniversary concert by Falcom's jdk Band, the Japanese developer announced that four previously unlocalized Trails games would be released in the West by NIS America on PC, PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch.

They include The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero, which is set for a Fall 2022 release, and Trails to Azure, Trails into Reverie and The Legend of Nayuta: Boundless Trails, all releasing in 2023.

For Falcom fans, this announcement has been awaited for over a decade! Trails from Zero and Trails to Azure – a.k.a. the Crossbell duology, since they take place in the city-state of Crossbell – were first released in 2010 and 2011, respectively, on PlayStation Portable in Japan. XSEED localized the Trails games directly before and after the Crossbell duology: Trails in the Sky 1, 2 & 3 and Trails of Cold Steel 1 & 2. However, fans longed for this missing piece of the series . . . so much so that a team known as The Geofront (a reference to an area in Crossbell) fan-translated the titles and released unofficial English patches for the games.

Now, their work will live on in the official translations, too! During the concert, The Geofront and NIS America revealed their partnership, where The Geofront's translations will serve as the basis for the official releases of Trails from Zero and Trails to Azure, according to their website.

Trails from Zero and Trails to Azure's story runs concurrently with Trails of Cold Steel 1 & 2 in the series' timeline. The games' story features the newly formed Special Support Section in Crossbell's Police Department: a team tasked with handling specific requests from townspeople.

Trails into Reverie serves as an epilogue/bridge game for the series and features three protagonists: Lloyd Bannings of the Crossbell duology, Rean Schwarzer from the Cold Steel arc and C, a mysterious masked figure. It initially released in 2020 in Japan and takes place after Trails of Cold Steel IV. It will tie up loose ends and set the stage for a new Trails arc in the Calvard Republic. That arc will begin this year with the release of Kuro no Kiseki in Japan on September 30.

Finally, The Legend of Nayuta: Boundless Trails first released in 2012 on PSP and recently received a remaster for PS4 in June. This Trails spin-off follows the adventures of Nayuta and features real-time action combat like that of Falcom's Ys series, instead of Trails' turn-based system.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Branded Board Games

Replay tabletop classics with fresh Nintendo editions!

VIDEO GAMES CONVERTED to board games used to be an odd proposition, and they often led to lackluster or overly simplistic games. Like that first Super Mario Bros. board game from Milton Bradley! These days, though, turning to the tabletop is a good way to play classic board games with the flavor of your favorite video game series, while also experiencing twists on their normal gameplay.

If you didn't get enough Animal Crossing: New Horizons last year, USAopoly is offering a new Monopoly version based on the game. (Just don't let Tom Nook be the banker!) Players pick one of four villager tokens and then traverse the board in normal style. A skill card can be chosen that gives each player a special ability they can use for the whole game. The twist is the traditional properties on the game board are replaced with collectables like bugs, fruit, fossils and fish. The colors represent the values of the items, so "Park Place" is a rare butterfly instead! A Nook die determines what players can sell for cash. Players then buy decorations worth Nook Miles, and the player with the most Nook Miles wins the game.

Hasbro is offering The Game of Life: Super Mario Edition, where you become Mario, Luigi, Peach or Yoshi on an adventure to bring Bowser down and save the Mushroom Kingdom. The token pieces are very nice little sculpts of the characters. This version has less to do with the traditional game – Mario won't be going to college or having kids – and acts more like a simple board game where you spin and follow the path. Mario elements like collecting coins and power-ups like stars that add a point to the spinner add to the fun. The stars are pegs that fit into the bases of the tokens, just like the pegs that represent people in the classic game. Minigame competitions are played every so often off-board – like Rock/Paper/Scissors and thumb wars – that net you more items. Finally, you'll cash in your coins to help you beat Bowser!

BY BRETT MARTIN

Fierce Figures

Select your swordsman statuette.

GOOD SMILE RARELY disappoints, and anime-style characters are their specialty. Their latest offering from a Nintendo property is Ike from Fire Emblem. Ike is 1/7 scale and stands over 16 inches tall. He appears to be ready to strike with Ragnell, his holy sword. In fact, the pose mirrors the art from Radiant Dawn by Senri Kita. Pre-orders are open for a June release next year. Ike will retail for around $200.

The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel Rean Schwarzer figure is from Kotobukiya and will stand around 8.5 inches tall. Rean will sport his instructor uniform from Trails of Cold Steel III. Pre-orders for him will start shortly, and pre-orders of Cold Steel's Altina Orion are ongoing for her 2021 release. Rean will likely be released in 2022. Ordering straight from Kotobukiya nets Altina a smiling face attachment, so Rean will most likely have a bonus part too.

Super Mario Watch

. . . and at over $2,000, it's also super pricey!

WHEN THINKING ABOUT possible products to offer collaborations with Nintendo characters, expensive watches are pretty low on the list. That didn't stop Tag Heuer Connected from creating a Mario watch that will retail for $2,150! Think nobody will pay that for a Mario watch? The limited edition offering has already sold out! The smart watch shows animations during the day. At 3:00 pm Mario grows larger with a Super Mushroom that you can see on the bezel. At 6:00 pm, he goes down a pipe and at 9:00 pm he gets a Super Star, showing Invincible Mario flashing and running. When you reach your step goal for the day, Mario slides down a flag pole. As for the watch face itself, there are five different designs: animations only, NES pixelated elements, classic art, modern art and a unique burst of random Mario elements like Koopa Shells or Mushrooms floating around in black. There are also Mario embellishments on the crown, the pusher and the two included straps. (All sorts of other features accompany the watch, but those are the Mario-centric features.) It even comes with a red travel case!

Taking Home a Piece of Nintendo Tokyo

The core store's core four have inspired some smaller souvenirs.

EVER THOUGHT OF running into one of Nintendo's stores and stealing one of their giant statues? Just me? Well, now there's a much cheaper way to own those statues (without commiting a crime), but there's a catch: the statues are miniature versions of those that appear at the Nintendo Store in Tokyo. For around $70 each, you can own the Mario, Link, Isabelle with the Nook twins and Inkling Girl statues sold either at the store or one of the pop-up stores sprouting up in locations in Japan starting in June. It's tough to get an idea of scale on these, as most pictures just show the figures and nothing else, but they look to be around 10 inches tall. Maybe more. The whole set is available in special packaging for around $250. There was no real way for anyone outside of Japan to get them at retail, and auctions have been going from anywhere between a $20 markup to double retail!

Heritage Auctions are Off the Rails

A copy of Super Mario 64 just sold for $1,560,000. What is going on?

BY NOW YOU'VE probably heard about the July 11 auction in which a graded copy of Super Mario 64 sold for an exorbitant $1,560,000. This sale came on the heels of a sealed copy of Super Mario Bros. selling at $660,000 and The Legend of Zelda netting $870,000, both shattering records. While the bids were actually less, the markup from Heritage Auctions' fees led to the final prices. Speculation runs rampant, as nothing in the gaming world has ever come close to selling for this much.

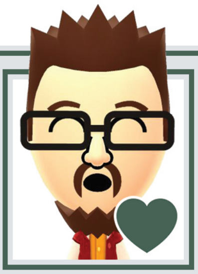
Scrutiny by the game collecting community was immediate, with some even speculating it was a money laundering scheme. These were impeccable copies of the games, with nary a dent among them and perfect seals, and they were graded 9.0 and higher. But they've never sold close to that mark on eBay!

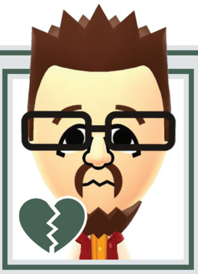
Heritage Auctions has been around longer than most video games in general, having been founded in 1976. The issue is the partnership between the graders at Wata Games and the auction house. These high-profile auctions benefit both the auction house (I hadn't even heard of Heritage Auctions before these recent massive sales) and the team at Wata Games, who have essentially officially become the preeminent graders of video games. While Wata always had competition, their competitors were less organized or just starting out, like the new video games wing of the CCG, famous for grading comics, coins and more.

This begs the question whether or not the number was inflated in order to turn heads, create a viral sensation and kickstart the graded video game gold rush that has seemingly stemmed from these auctions. What we could also be seeing is market manipulation where a few big auctions lead other investors to enter the market, drive prices up and then sell big as other people invest in the items, leaving collectors and enthusiasts in the dust. Where will it end?! **— BRETT**

> "This Heritage Auctions situation has disrupted the collecting community so severely and made prices so volatile that even this insane record-breaking total brought in by a lone copy of Super Mario 64 has apparently been bested again by a $2,000,000 sale of another Super Mario Bros. NES cartridge just as we're going to press with this issue. It really seems like something shady is going on here, because as much as you might like Mario, these copies of common carts – in great condition, granted – just aren't reasonably worth this much. – **LUCAS**"

Great!
I can retire thanks to my sealed Ocarina of Time!





Oh.
I'd probably have to be complicit in a crime.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

SPEEDING TO STORE shelves fastest in September will be an all-new Ultimate edition of Sonic Colors. Modern Sonic sequels have been hit or miss over the last few hardware generations, but when Colors first arrived on the Wii in 2010, it established itself as one of the Blue Blur's best almost instantly. Will it be welcomed with open arms for a second time, this time on the Switch? Take a look at our preview on Page 49.

SONIC'S SET FOR September 7, which means if you snag a copy of Colors on its release date, you'll have three days to speedrun through it before the next major Switch release will vie for your attention. WarioWare: Get It Together! puts a two-player co-op spin on the venerable microgaming series, and it can be yours September 10. See Page 52!

IF YOU'VE SPENT any time in bowling alleys, Chuck E. Cheese establishments or other venues that still dedicate some small amount of floor space to actual, honest-to-goodness coin-op arcade cabinets within the last few years, chances are you've come across Cruis'n Blast. Its arcade exclusivity is coming to an end, though, as it's racing to the Nintendo Switch starting on September 14! Check out Page 50 for more on this one.

THE VIDEO GAME industry has offered up no shortage of ways to interact with the classic tale of Goku and the Z Fighters over the years, and the latest retelling of the cartoon saga came along in the form of Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot, which launched on PC, PS4 and Xbox One in January 2020. Better late than never, it's hitting Switch on September 24!

AS SUMMER BEGINS to give way to Fall, one final release worth spotlighting will close September out by dropping into the eShop on the last day of the month: Astria Ascending. This gorgeous JRPG boasts an incredibly appealing hand-drawn art style — take a first look at it and see for yourself by flipping over to Page 18!

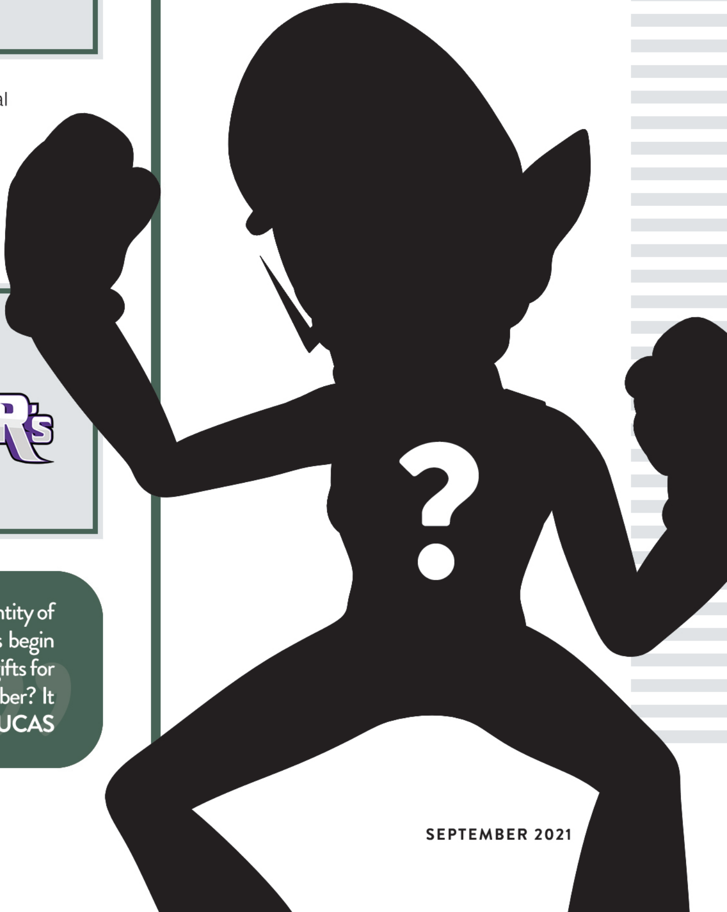
OUR COVER GAME for this edition, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge, brings up the rear in this Forecast because, sadly, it does not yet have a locked-in release date as we're going to press. It likely won't arrive in September, so do forgive us for being a little early with offering it the honor of our cover spot! We couldn't wait longer!

> You can always count on the month of September to reliably begin ramping up the quantity of quality new releases. Decades ago, that's when publishers decided that most parents begin doing holiday shopping for their kids! I don't know if that's true any more. Do you buy gifts for your loved ones each year? And, if so, do you start your shopping process in September? It seems a little too early to me any more, but I'm happy to get new games sooner! — **LUCAS**

IT'S BEEN CONFIRMED. Though many fans (ourselves included) had hoped that Super Smash Bros. Ultimate might get a third Fighters Pass to add even more combatants to the crossover chaos, Mr. Sakurai has squashed that speculation. Fighters Pass Vol. 2 is the end of the road for Ultimate. That means that only one fighter remains to be revealed!

I'm going to miss speculating about Smash. At least, I'll miss it while we're in the off-season in between Ultimate and the announcement of whatever the next sequel will be in the future. Who knows where Smash will go next?

For now, I'll go on record and make my final guess official: Waluigi. I think he's got that last spot. I think the fan outcry that prompted us to dedicate a whole issue to this guy back in 2018 was heard, and that he'll make the cut. (I hope!)



More Trouble in River City

The chaos continues, but new recruits arrive to help clean up the streets in River City Girls 2.

THE BRAWLER GENRE has been getting quite a boost here in the Switch generation, as retro revivals like last year's Streets of Rage 4 and this year's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge have been skillfully mixing together a perfect blend of modern game design ideas with loads of old-school nostalgia. Even older school than the first Streets of Rage or TMNT beat-'em-ups, though, is the classic Kunio-kun series, which threw its first jab in 1986. And its latest chapter beat those other recent brawlers to the punch, too: WayForward's retro revival, River City Girls, debuted two years ago in September 2019.

That's about enough time to have made some solid progress toward a sequel, don't you think?

Happily, that's exactly the case. River City Girls 2 was officially announced during the Limited Run Games E3 presentation in June, it's deep into development now and it's expected to debut in 2022.

Wanting to know more, we reached out to Adam Tierney and Bannon Rudis – WayForward's directors on River City Girls and River City Girls 2, respectively – for a mid-development Q&A. First up, we asked about any new playable characters being added to the cast!

"There are new playable characters in the game," Bannon confirmed, adding, "and I was afraid they might be too fun to play as, so we went back and updated the original characters as well to bring a little something new to entice players coming back to the series."

The new fighters are Marian, back from the first River City Girls (though her story began in the '80s), as well as Provie, whose first appearance was in River City Ransom: Underground, a PC game released in 2017. See their sidebars for more!

Back to Adam and Bannon, we wanted to know about another new feature in the sequel: online play!

"We actually looked into doing online for the first game, but it was not feasible for our schedule," said Bannon. "We needed to make sure we had a solid foundation for the game first before trying to tackle online, since that is handled very differently.

Q&A QUESTIONS BY JONATHAN HOLMES

DOUBLE DRAGON'S DAMSEL (NO DISTRESS)
MARIAN

When the arcade-goers of 1987 dropped their first quarter into Double Dragon, a cutscene set up the story in about five seconds: The helpless Marian gets punched in the gut by a punk on the street, then carried away by him and his gang. The players, taking on the role of her enraged boyfriend Billy and his twin brother Jimmy, then pursued the thugs, punching every face that got in their way! Now, decades later, Marian no longer needs any man to rescue her. She's trained relentlessly to rebuild her body into a total pain-making machine, and while she stood on the sidelines (in a shop) during the events of the first River City Girls, she's finally leaping into action in the sequel, ready to unleash over 30 years' worth of pent-up rage. Bad guys, you better watch your guts!

RISING UP FROM THE UNDERGROUND
PROVIE

If you missed out on playing 2017's River City Ransom: Underground, that would be understandable – it's been locked down to PC platforms since its debut four and a half years ago, after all, and anyone reading this magazine is more than likely largely loyal to the Nintendo family of systems! Still, Provie proved herself in her debut appearance in that game to such a grand degree that she's now been revived for inclusion in River City Girls 2. A master of the Brazilian martial art of capoeira, Provie is constantly in motion in any battle, letting fly with a flurry of fists and feet. Her kicks are especially flashy and deadly, as she wheels her heels through the air and spins on her head while on the ground, twisting up a storm with more twirling power than a Hitmontop!

COVID was one of the driving influences to making online. We weren't sure when players would be able to join each other in their homes for couch co-op and, also, people really wanted online anyhow. So, we decided to give the people what they wanted. It has not been easy, but we think it's worth the extra effort."

River City Girls 1 had two different endings. So which one will 2 canonize as being what really happened?

Adam answered, "We watch a lot of Twitch playthroughs of River City Girls, and so we saw people who loved the original ending and people who didn't. I was very happy that we were able to get an alternate ending into the first update patch, though. That wasn't us backing away from the original ending (which is still in the game). But for beating the secret boss and (without spoilers) kind of bending reality, players deserved a different resolution for their extra effort. We can say here that the secret ending is where RCG2 begins from. It wouldn't have made much sense to have people do the extra work to get the extra ending, then say nah, the earlier one still counts. And the extra ending worked better to set up the events and gameplay of RCG2."

Seek out that extra ending, folks!

We asked if there will be any new modes in this sequel. Bannon replied, "The missions and quests in River City Girls are much more diverse. There are going to be many more fun activities to do. Some are callbacks to old Kunio-kun sports titles."

Then, while crossing our fingers for copious references to Crash 'N The Boys: Street Challenge, we asked how the sequel's gameplay might be refined from the first game's.

"Lots of the things added to the sequel are for ease of use for players. So anything that I noticed was irritating the player, whether a casual player or expert player, I wanted to figure out a way to alleviate things in their favor. So if an enemy blocked too much, now there is a way to combat that." Those words from Bannon, once again.

Lastly, and purely selfishly, we asked, "What would it take for us to get an issue of NF to appear in RCG2?"

Adam: "What would it take for us to get an RCG2 cover on a future issue of Nintendo Force?"

Bannon: "Sure, we can get a copy of NF in the background, as long as you don't mind it looking like a tiny little mess of pixels!"

So please look forward to River City Girls 2 in 2022. Maybe featuring a tiny mess of NF Magazine pixels! **— LUCAS**

Resurrected and Redrawn

Sharpen your sword for the unexpected sequel GetsuFumaDen: Undying Moon!

DURING A NINTENDO Indie World presentation earlier this year, Konami made a rather surprising announcement: GetsuFumaDen: Undying Moon will be coming to the Nintendo Switch at some point in 2022.

The announcement is surprising for a few reasons, not the least of which is the considerably reduced output of games Konami publishes these days. On top of that, Undying Moon is actually a remake of a previous Konami game – one released for the Famicom more than three decades ago! If that wasn't enough – though the game did see re-release through the various Virtual Consoles over the years – it never left its homeland of Japan. (See Page 57 for more!)

Suffice to say, if Konami was going to greenlight a new title, you'd expect that they might pick from one of their more prominent franchises, of which they have many. Go figure.

GetsuFumaDen ("Story of the Lunar Wind Demon," per Hardcore Gaming 101): Undying Moon boasts gameplay with 2D art inspired by the Japanese ukiyo-e style, and it's going to have hack-'n-slash action with roguelite elements. However, death won't mark the end of your journey through the world of the dead, but rather a new beginning as new maps and challenges will appear with every attempt.

Along the way, you'll gather souls to power yourself up further, as well as various weapons and sub-weapons, each with their own fighting styles. You'll also be able to craft enhancements for each, granting you various upgrades and methods of customization, giving you various avenues of progression.

Also of note is that Konami seems to be leaning hard into M-rated territory here, so make sure you put the kids to bed before loading this one up!

While some elements remain true to the original GetsuFumaDen, this revival seems to be taking things in a rather different direction. But as it just so happens, while we never got the original here in the West, we *did* get another title with more than a few similarities, in a surprising half-shell form! (See Page 35!) **— DAVID**

Brawlhalla + TMNT . . . Sort Of

Ubisoft's free-to-play Smash-like has added the Turtles, but only cosmetically.

IF IT WEREN'T for the fact that the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were first featured in comics rather than originating from video games, I'm sure we would have seen them show up in Nintendo's Smash Bros. series by this point. That's one criterion that hasn't been broken yet, though: For as wild as the Smash roster has become, every character in it still has the common ground of having appeared in a video game first before showing up in any other form of media.

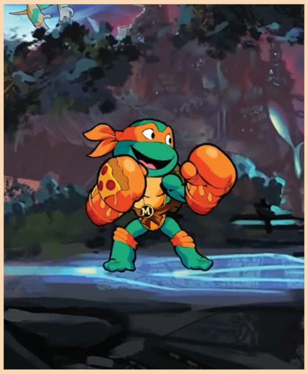
So, with Smash proper closed off to the Heroes in a Half Shell, they've had to look to similar games to prove their appropriateness for the Smash style of gameplay. They got their own Smash clone in the Wii era (see Page 42). And their ownership currently lying with Nickelodeon earned them an invite to another that's coming soon (see Page 54). But there's a third source to turn to for fans who want to Smash it up with Leo, Mikey, Donnie and Raph: Ubisoft's Brawlhalla.

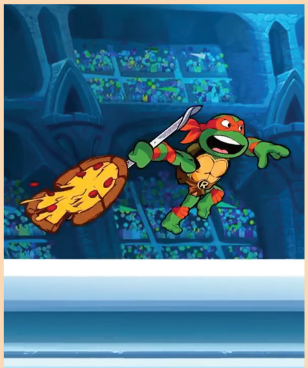
The only problem? These fighters look like the Turtles, but they don't fight like the Turtles.

Brawlhalla is a game we've brought up only briefly in these pages in the past, never bothering to give it a true review since it's plagued by predatory pricing practices. It's "free-to-play" to begin with, but then to get access to characters like the Turtles, you have to first convert your cash to the in-game currency — and you're not allowed to buy just the amount you need.

Getting the TMNT takes an investment of at least $30. Which might be worth it for super fans . . . except for the fact that, again, they're not themselves. They're just skins, cosmetically altering older characters to look like the ninja bros. Anachronistic examples posted below. Why would resolute warrior Leo grind a skateboard into battle, wielding Casey Jones' hockey stick? Why is Mikey fighting with a pair of boxing gloves? Well, because that's what the devs had to do to cover up the fact that the Turtles are just "Echo Fighters" in this interpretation.

So this has been a public service announcement. Consider Nick's Brawl rather than Brawlhalla. **— LUCAS**





FACE THE FATE OF THE EIGHT

A beautiful hand-drawn adventure awaits you in the all-new Astria Ascending!

DOES LIVING IN harmony have a price?

That's one question, among many others, that upcoming JRPG Astria Ascending will attempt to answer when it arrives on September 30.

This hand-drawn 2D adventure from Artisan Studios will feature a story from writer Kazushige Nojima (Final Fantasy X and VII Remake) and music by Hitoshi Sakimoto (Final Fantasy Tactics and XII). Nojima's story sounds intriguing: It features the world of Orcanon, where five races live together in harmony thanks to the "harmelon" fruit – but eating the fruit also suppresses each race's natural instincts and abilities.

"That's the theme I want to discuss in this game. 'What is our harmelon in real life?'" said Nojima.

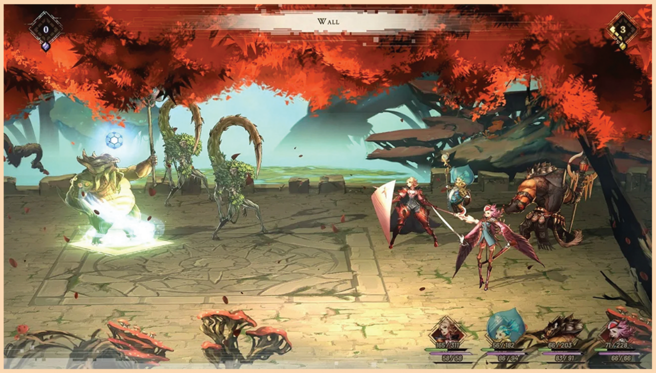
At the same time, the Noises also threaten Orcanon's harmony, and that's where the heroes come in. Players will take on the roles of the Fated Eight: eight randomly selected citizens who become Demigods and fight the Noises for a three-year term . . . before they die.

The Demigods are composed of people from all five of Orcanon's races. Some include the leader, Ulan, a spear- and shield-wielding Meryo (a race that resembles humans); Eko, a Peyska scholar who has fish-like features; Dagmar, an Arktan sorcerer who has the traits of a lion; Kress, a Zeft fencer with a lizard-like look, and Kaydin, a winged Awisi explorer.

Not only is the art style beautiful in Astria Ascending, but it's also refreshing to see how the character designs deviate from the conventional look of their classes: Dagmar is the largest member of the party with a muscular build, but he's the sorcerer; while Arpajo, the thief, is an older man with a white, fluffy beard.

Combat is turn-based. You fight in a squad of four by attacking, guarding and gathering Focus Points, which power up each character's skills.

The world of Orcanon appears to be a beautiful place, but darker secrets lie within. If you're a fan of 2D JRPGs and deep storylines, this is one to look out for! – **MAGGIE**



REVIEWS

7.5

Another '80s Ninja Returns

NINJA GAIDEN: MASTER COLLECTION

THE HISTORY OF Ninja Gaiden is a complicated one, consisting of multiple lines of continuity, iterative releases and various levels of platform exclusivity. This collection is focused specifically on the most recent renditions of the reboot series that kicked off in 2004, and includes Ninja Gaiden Σ, Ninja Gaiden Σ2 and Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge. Whether or not that's an enticing lineup will depend greatly on your own prior experience.

For example, if you're looking for a modern take on the groundbreaking NES Ninja Gaiden trilogy, these games likely aren't for you. With the exception of a handful of familiar names, the story, music and gameplay bear no connections whatsoever to those classics.

Similarly, if you're a fan of the original releases in the modern saga, those have been excluded in favor of their controversial newer iterations. Σ is bogged down by questionable changes and superfluous new levels, Σ2 dramatically alters Gaiden II's grisly-yet-fun dismemberment system and the Nintendo DS game Dragon Sword is missing entirely.

But enough about what this collection isn't! Let's focus instead on what it actually is, and that is a ton of fun. You are legendary ninja Ryu Hayabusa and you're out to slice up some bad guys. You'll take on mercenaries, other ninjas, monsters, robots, living statues and more. The games do have stories, but they're so nonsensical that it barely matters. They only serve as a vessel to deliver more combat, which is some of the best in the business.

You begin each game with Ryu's iconic Dragon Sword, but it isn't long before you start acquiring different weapons, and each one comes with its own in-depth moveset for you to master. But Ryu can't survive on offense alone. Defense is paramount in combating the punishing difficulty. A mastery of blocking and dodging is a must.

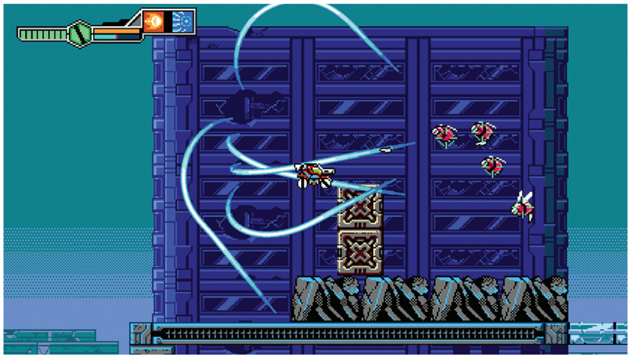
Fortunately, the challenge is rarely presented as completely unfair. Most of the time you'll be able to see exactly who killed you and why. It can be frustrating for sure – especially certain bosses – but victory is incredibly satisfying.

There are some light exploration elements, especially in the first game, but all three do a fantastic job of letting you explore how you want to. There's a basic map you can follow, but if you get lost there are optional commands that quite literally point you in the direction you're supposed to go next. It's a brilliantly subtle way of making sure that if you're ever stuck, it isn't from a lack of direction.

Of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that Ninja Gaiden's depictions of the female form are borderline embarrassing, both in terms of fashion and physics. This doesn't have any effect on the actual gameplay, but it is an issue that is very present and could reasonably have a negative impact on your overall enjoyment.

These three games are very much a product of their time, but underneath their flaws lies some of the best ninja action ever put in a video game. No matter how you slice it, (or what you slice it with) Ninja Gaiden: Master Collection is an extraordinary value. **– KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KOEI TECMO RATING: M



End of a Mutant-Blasting Era
BLASTER MASTER ZERO 3

BLASTER MASTER ZERO was a retro reboot/revival done right. It took what worked about the original NES classic and expanded on it in intelligent ways, while largely ignoring the bevy of lackluster sequels that followed it. The second Zero entry gave the franchise its first successful direct follow-up by taking what they established in Zero 1 and expanding on it with more complicated mechanics, a deeper story and a larger view of the game's universe. I'm happy to report that Blaster Master Zero 3 continues that trend to an impressive degree, and while I would caution anyone trying to get into the series for the first time that this might be one of the worst games to start with, it's also probably the best game the Blaster Master franchise has ever seen.

If you're unfamiliar with what Blaster Master is, at its core it's an exploratory platformer crossed with a top-down action adventure. Half of the game puts you in control of a jumping tank called G-SOPHIA SV. You pilot this vehicle through a gigantic interconnected open world, and you gain access to new areas as you discover new items and abilities. Think games like Hollow Knight, Axiom Verge or anything referred to as a "Metroidvania." What's always set Blaster Master apart, though, is the ability to jump out of your tank at any time and explore on foot. This leaves you incredibly fragile by comparison, but it affords you the ability to enter interior areas that your tank can't. Once inside, the game turns into an overhead, almost Zelda-style adventure full of its own unique weapons, enemies and mechanics.

The story picks up where Zero 2 left off, with series protagonists Jason, Eve and their support frog Fred heading to Planet Sophia to try and find a permanent cure for a Mutant virus that has infected Eve. Upon their arrival, Sophia's defense force attacks the team and they wind up separated and imprisoned. Jason sets out to escape, find his friends and figure out why Sophia attacked them in the first place.

The whole narrative is extremely "anime," which certainly won't be for everyone, and some of the character designs definitely lean a little too much in the fanservice direction, going so far as to feature a plant-based character with literal gigantic "melons." The good news is, even if that sort of stuff isn't your style, the rest of the game is so good it won't matter.

As in any good Blaster Master game, driving G-SOPHIA is, well, a blast. It has just the right amount of weight and power behind all of its movements. Unfortunately, when you were captured at the beginning of the game, G-SOPHIA got stripped for parts, so a lot of the gear you finished Zero 2 with isn't immediately available. Some of your latent abilities are eventually restored, and the rest see replacements in the form of all-new skills that open the door to some extremely clever segments. From an ability that somehow turns your tank into a liquid to an item that changes an infamous death trap from the previous game into a new avenue of transportation, Blaster Master Zero 3 never stops throwing new and fantastic ideas your way. Much-needed refinements have also been made to existing mechanics, including complete overhauls to the parrying and weapon power-up systems.

But the primary new feature on display is the VRV system. This allows you to travel through cracks in reality into what the game calls "super-dimensional space." This initially presents itself as a sort of "light world/dark world" mechanic that we've seen dozens of times in other games, but the execution here is rather unique. While you do often

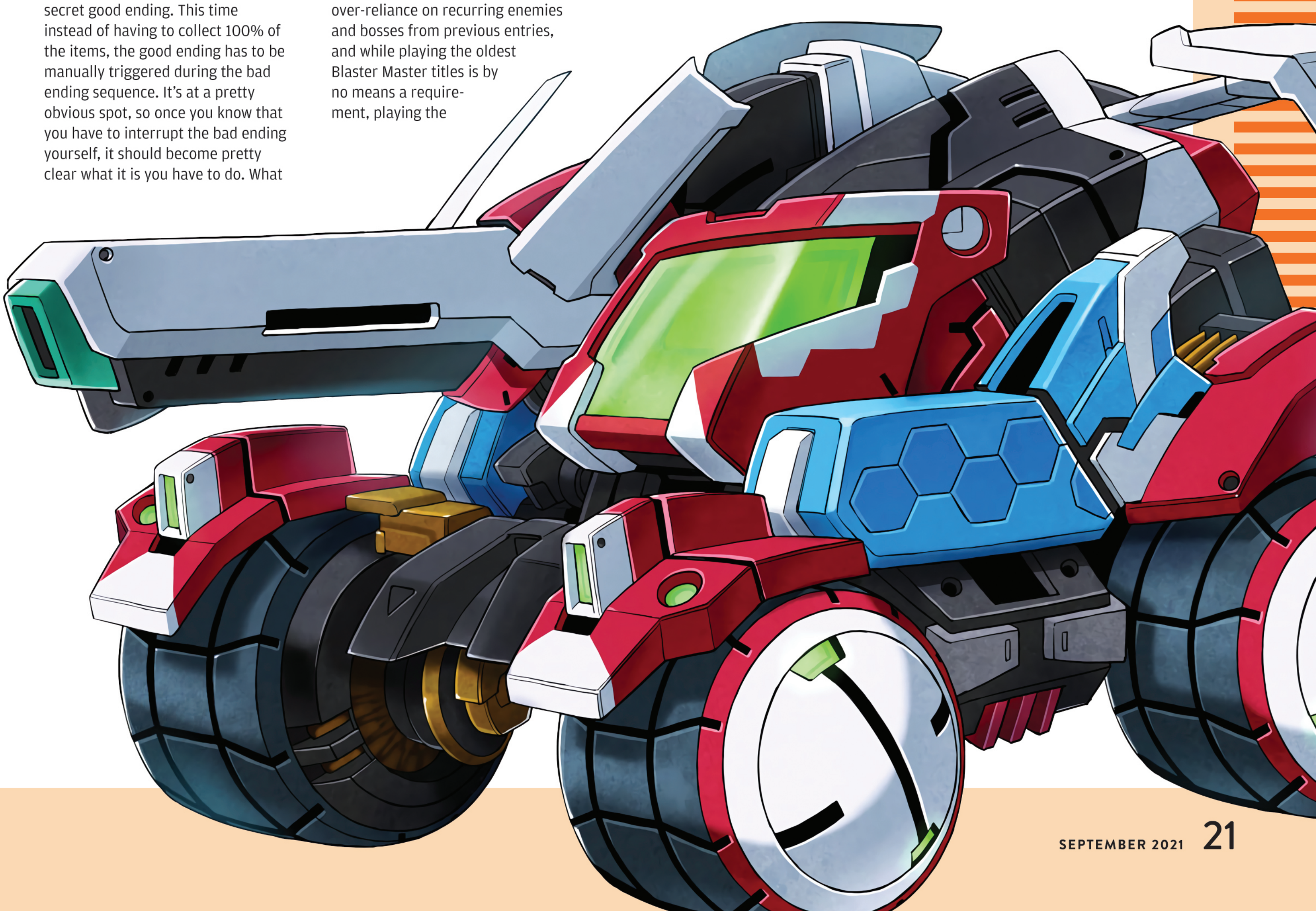
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES RATING: E10+

find yourself needing to travel between dimensions to alter things in the other, a lot of times super-dimensional space will simply offer alternate routes to get you where you're going. So if you're having a particularly tough time in regular space, perhaps the enemies in super-dimensional space will be easier for you to deal with.

As in the previous two games, there's both a bad ending and a secret good ending. This time instead of having to collect 100% of the items, the good ending has to be manually triggered during the bad ending sequence. It's at a pretty obvious spot, so once you know that you have to interrupt the bad ending yourself, it should become pretty clear what it is you have to do. What follows is some of the most amazingly satisfying throwbacks I've ever experienced in a video game. The main campaign is littered with fantastic references on its own, but this last area features some stunningly effective callbacks to the previous two Zero games, Blaster Master for NES, its Famicom counterpart Metafight and even Blaster Master: Blasting Again for PlayStation.

On the negative side, there is an over-reliance on recurring enemies and bosses from previous entries, and while playing the oldest Blaster Master titles is by no means a requirement, playing the two Zero games basically is. Without the context of what came before it, the mechanics will likely come off as overly complicated, and the story would lose most if not all of its meaning. Once you've played its prequels though, Blaster Master Zero 3 stands as one of the most well-made games of its kind, and delivers the promised conclusion that the series deserves. — **KRIS**

8.5



8.0

Follow the LEGO Brick Road

LEGO BUILDER'S JOURNEY

WHEN PLAYING WITH LEGO, a builder has two choices: either follow the carefully prepared instructions step by step, or ignore them completely and build from the heart.

This, apparently, is also true in the digital sphere. The majority of LEGO games carefully follow an established formula: pop culture references + slapstick humor + solving puzzles by smashing things.

In defiance of this formula, LEGO Builder's Journey throws away the instruction booklet and encourages the player to actually do some building. This shouldn't be a revolutionary concept for a LEGO game, and yet this is the most original title I've played since first trying out the demo for LEGO Star Wars: The Video Game all the way back in 2004.

LEGO Builder's Journey feels more like an indie game than an installment in one of the biggest gaming franchises on the planet. You solve a series of 3D isometric puzzles to help two abstract characters – a parent and a child – explore a changing landscape. Most of the time this involves using authentic LEGO bricks to build a bridge across tricky terrain, as the characters bond over their mutual love of nature and creative play.

It's worth pointing out that not everything about LEGO Builder's Journey is a fresh spin on the source material. If this premise of two family members growing closer through playing with LEGO feels familiar, it's because that's literally the plot of all four major motion pictures set in the wider LEGO universe. It's even the central premise of the Simpsons episode all about LEGO! As much as LEGO may be synonymous with family playtime by this point, it would have been nice if Builder's Journey had tried something a little more unique with its main story.

Even so, the presentation of this familiar tale is gorgeous. Everything in the environment is made out of LEGO bricks, giving the entire game a stop-motion feel. The design is abstract, the music is slow and rich, and the entire play experience is mostly quite relaxing. The vast majority of puzzles can be solved without much hassle, and there's no penalty for failure, so the player can simply zone out and soak up the game's atmosphere.

Alas, though, there is one major barrier to this being an entirely stress-free experience: the controls. Placing shapes in an isometric space can be a frustrating experience to say the least. Bricks don't always go where you want them to, and for some puzzles that require very specific brick placement, the biggest barrier to progression can be figuring out the camera.

If it had arrived a few years earlier, this is one game that would have been perfectly suited to the 3DS, as a little depth perception would have gone a long way to making these puzzles less annoying. As it stands, even the game's touchscreen controls feel clumsy and awkward. It's disappointing that, in a game all about the joy of creation, the actual process of creating something feels like such a chore.

This challenge aside, LEGO Builder's Journey is a thoroughly enjoyable little game. It won't take you too long to complete, but the experience will be worth the time that you do invest into it.

If you're a fan of LEGO but you're tired of the usual slapstick smashy gameplay, or if you like simple puzzle games, LEGO Builder's Journey is a hidden gem that might be exactly the game you're looking for on a rainy day. **– MATTHEW L.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: LEGO SYSTEM DEVELOPER: LIGHT BRICK STUDIO RATING: E

Monster World IV Reborn

WONDER BOY: ASHA IN MONSTER WORLD

THE TWICE-NAMED SERIES of Wonder Boy/Monster World has been enjoying something of a revival over the past few years, with games like 2017's Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap and 2018's Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom introducing many new gamers to this iconic yet eclectic series.

While the specifics of each game vary, the central gameplay style feels like what you'd get if you put Mario and Zelda in a blender: a sidescrolling action RPG with a strong focus on platforming and finding hidden secrets.

Wonder Boy: Asha in Monster World is a remake of Monster World IV, a game that first debuted on the Sega Mega Drive in Japan, but wasn't released in the West until it came to the Wii Virtual Console in 2012. As such, while nostalgia might be able to carry this game in Japan, it's likely not going to hit in quite the same way for most English-speaking players.

You play as Asha, exploring a magical land with the help of her floating blue accomplice Pepelogoo, who is essentially Kirby with giant ears. While some games in the series are proto-Metroidvanias, this game takes the Majora's Mask approach to world design, dropping you off in a hub city from which you can venture outward to various dungeons before returning to restock your supplies.

Game remakes always prove divisive, with some people embracing more advanced technology, while others prefer the original design. In this case, it's truly difficult to say whether anything in this remake justifies its existence, as there's no standout feature that feels better than the original Mega Drive title.

While the game boasts 3D polygonal graphics, it's apparent that there's a 16-bit game design under the hood. Dungeons can feel a little lacking at times, with sparse areas bereft of any enemies, repetitive platforming and simple mazes that involve hitting a button to open a door that's just one room away.

It's particularly hard to say whether the remake's updated visuals actually add anything over the original's charming sprite art. While the developers have tried their best to breathe life into Asha and the game's other characters with fancy polygon graphics, they often feel stiff and lifeless. Asha has a cute wiggle when she opens a chest, but she never feels like a living character, making this game feel at times like little more than bashing action figures together.

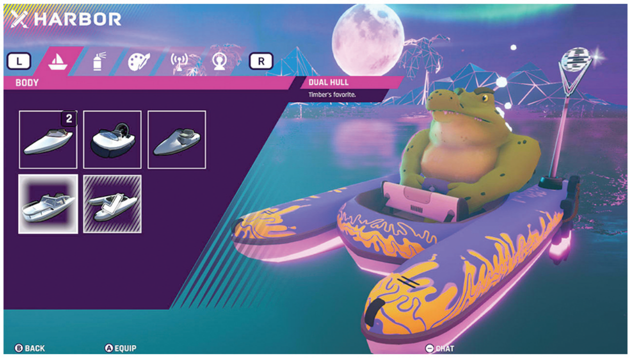
This feels most notable when in combat, as Asha in Monster World makes a very strong case for the importance of good game feel when creating character animations. Something about Asha's animation when swinging a sword feels lackluster, and there's little satisfaction to be had from landing a blow against an enemy. There's nothing specifically wrong with it; it simply feels a little damp – it's a poor translation of the original, far more successful character animation from nearly 30 years ago.

Make no mistake: Asha in Monster World is a fun game, and there's plenty here to enjoy. The game's delightful old-school framework is nice, even without being caked in a layer of nostalgia. There's a reason, after all, that Monster World IV warranted a remake in the first place. As far as HD remakes go, though, this isn't exactly Link's Awakening.

That wraps up our review of this game's digital edition, but consider seeking out a physical copy if you can – it exclusively contains the original Mega Drive game Monster World IV in all its pixelated glory as a free bonus, and that would boost the overall appeal here. **– MATTHEW L.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: STUDIOARTDINK
DEVELOPER: MONKEY CRAFT
RATING: E10+

7.5



Weezer's Water War

WAVE BREAK

ANYONE STILL EAGERLY anticipating the arrival of the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater-inspired Skatebird? If so, your wait for that skateboarding adventure starring a cast of cute little creatures might be able to be made a bit more bearable by this game, Wave Break, which basically presents the same proposition – just with a bear instead of little birds.

And an otter. And an alligator, and a raccoon.

Oh, and no skateboards here. All these critters cruise in speedboats instead!

Yes, Wave Break pitches itself as a "skateboating" game – where Tony had wheels on concrete, these guys have motors churning through water. In the end it's largely just a cosmetic difference, though. Playing Wave Break feels 90% like playing a lost Tony Hawk sequel.

The basic gameplay and structure of progression are lifted straight out of the Birdman's series. You take control of a character, get dropped into a freely explorable contained space, get three minutes on the clock and have a laundry list of objectives to meet before that time runs out. All of them knock-offs of Tony Hawk goals. You're tasked to, for example, collect the letters B-R-E-A-K by leaping to grab them out of the air, seek out other collectables like wads of cash or scrumptious hot dogs, find the hidden secret tape lying somewhere in the level and, of course, rack up sick high scores by pulling off crazy tricks and combos the whole time you're speeding around exploring the area.

Those tricks, again, are all skateboarding staples – you perform kickflips, grind along rails, launch off halfpipes to spin through the air while grabbing the nose of your boat and more. Really all it would take for this to become a skateboarding game is a swap-out of the visuals. I suspect that it actually was just a skateboarding game to begin with, then the developers decided to change the boards into boats in order to try to put a unique visual spin on the formula.

The problem with Wave Break being such a straight-up clone at its core is that it has a major barrier to entry. I was able to leap in well enough thanks to my own history playing Tony Hawk titles, but I could not recommend this game to anyone who doesn't also have experience with that series. The tutorial here is thin, and the gameplay will be nearly inscrutable to total newcomers.

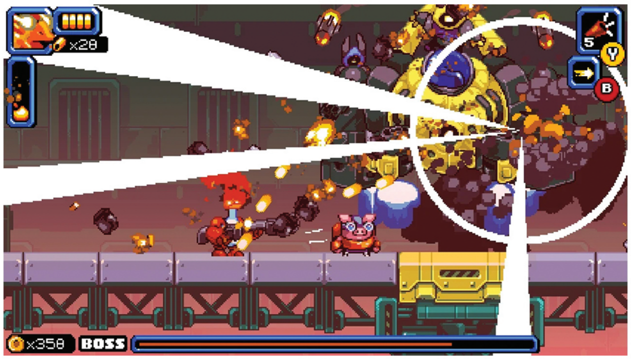
If you do have that background, though, and you can push through some other issues like imprecise controls and poor level design choices, there's a ton of cool content waiting to be discovered. The cast of characters is cute, and customizable – it's fun to dress up an otter in a top hat and see him speeding around in the ocean. The motorboats can be customized as well, and a full-on park editor lets you make your own levels from scratch, if you want to invest the time to do so.

The biggest selling point is the soundtrack, though. Tony Hawk's games always had amazing sets of songs to listen to while you played, and Wave Break is no different, with a truly great selection – including a completely original new track by the legendary Weezer!

Add an extra gameplay element of gunplay to that whole wild mix, and Wave Break offers a truly unique presentation of a truly nonunique gameplay foundation. Tony Hawk experts, here's a secret spin-off/sequel for your consideration. Everyone else, move out of the way of Wave Break's wake. **– LUCAS**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: FUNKTRONIC LABS RATING: T



Weaponized Waterfowl

MIGHTY GOOSE

TAKE AN ORDINARY goose, add a pair of cybernetic arms, give it weapons and a spaceship and send it off on bounty-hunting missions to destroy armies of baddies. That's the premise of Mighty Goose, a run-and-gun platformer from Blastmode and MP2 Games. The easiest way to describe it would be mixing the gameplay of Metal Slug with the plot of Metroid. While it's humorous, it's not as good as either of the afore-mentioned games.

You're immediately assaulted after exiting your ship's landing site. Initially the game provides the Goose with the ammo or vehicles he needs for the upcoming scenarios. The vehicles and mechs are fun, if not generally overpowered, and there are even a few shmup elements.

Destroying enemies nets you coins that you can then spend immediately in the pause menu's shop. A courier will drop off your item shortly after purchase – even during boss battles – and that can change the tide of any situation. However, the coins do not reappear after dying, so you can get stuck.

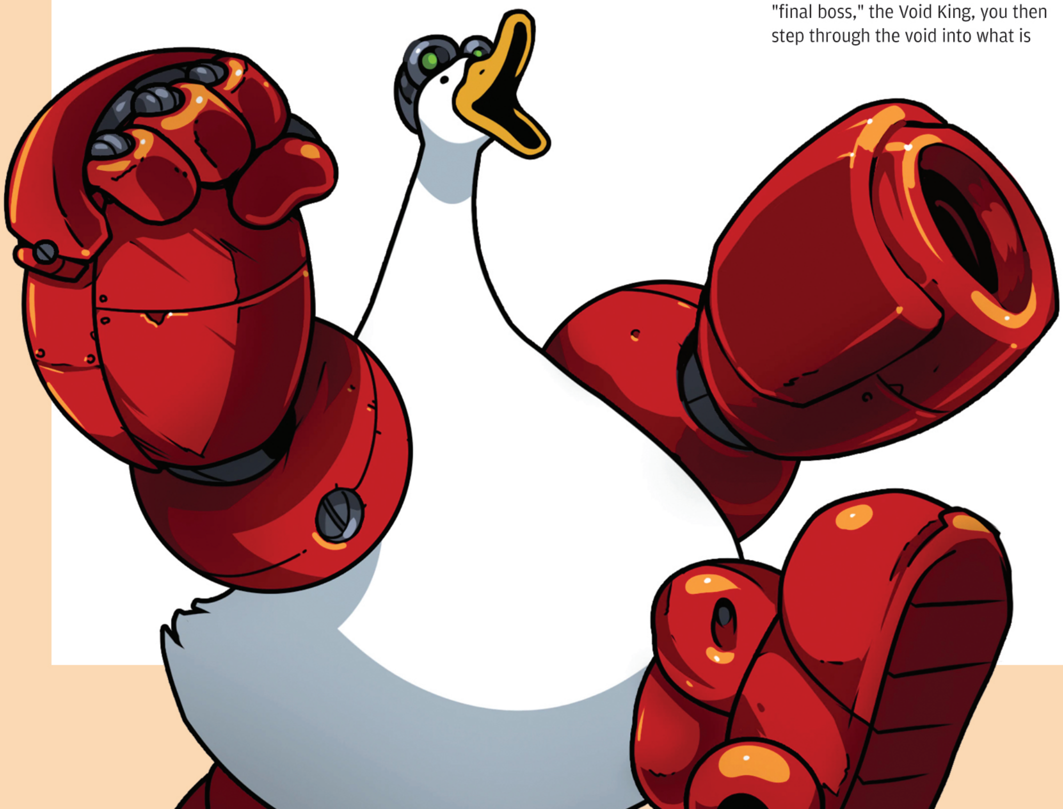
A filled Mighty Meter allows our hero to enter Mighty Goose mode! This makes him invulnerable and wildly powers up his entire arsenal.

The screen is often packed full of enemies, each with varying attacks. The overwhelming action is by design, but it can be hard to find the Goose or tell which shots are yours versus your enemies' with all the enemy parts and spent bullet casings flying around. The pixel art and the cutscenes are impressive and beautiful, but the camera felt a bit claustrophobic; a pan out would have benefitted the entire game.

Mighty Goose is not a terribly difficult game, and the initial offering is pretty short, as besting it lasts only a few hours or so. Once you defeat the "final boss," the Void King, you then step through the void into what is essentially a New Game Plus. It has the same levels, but they're much harder, with fewer power-ups and health drops. This way to play felt more balanced, as I was saving coins to spend in the shop for the hairy situations ahead, and not everything was handed to me. The bonus buffs you can select in the menu between levels became infinitely more important – as did the ally you choose. You pick up many allies in quick succession, so it's easy to not even know how an ally works before beating the first part of the game. The unlocks are poured on you, and I even missed seeing sections of the menu where I could add things because it's so cluttered and clunky.

After a while it all felt tedious. It was always fairly mindless, but it became too obvious where to use my Mighty Goose meter in levels, the "new gun feel" wore off and the well of new guns dried up. It got stale. I also hated the grading system for each level, which never made much sense. Sometimes I killed everything without dying, but received a worse score than when I had died.

While I can't overlook the addition of a dedicated honk button, Mighty Goose just doesn't hold up past a few hours of play. **– BRETT**



7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: PLAYISM DEVELOPERS: BLASTMODE & MP2 GAMES RATING: T

SWITCH PUBLISHER: THUNDERFUL
DEVELOPER: STUDIO FIZBIN
RATING: E10+

7.5

Speak Up! Assert Yourself!

SAY NO! MORE

IT CAN BE hard to say no.

Telling someone else to stop doing something can feel inconsiderate, especially if you want to be liked and accepted. Regardless, it's bad news when your kindness and eagerness to please keep you from taking control of a situation by saying no. The fact that the most empathetic and emotionally intelligent people in the world are also the least likely to pursue positions of power, while selfish narcissists are willing to do whatever it takes to become the next president and/or billionaire CEO, is the root of most of the world's problems.

Say No! More asks the question "What if you, a good person, decided to say no to everyone?" The answer is . . . complicated. I wish I could say "Yes! There is 'no' way you should skip this game.", but the reality isn't that cut and dried.

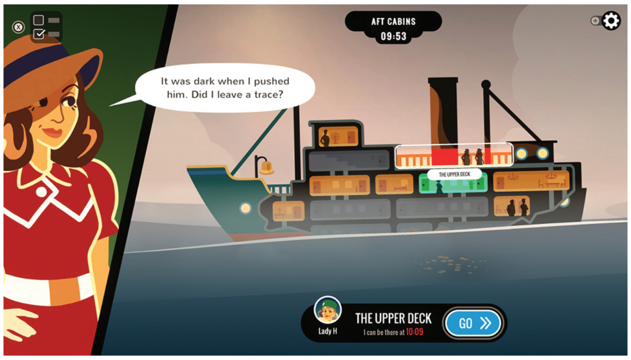
There's no question that Say No! More has an awesome premise. You're an intern at a big company, and for the first few minutes, you are too shy to speak. Everyone walks all over you. There's no gameplay to speak of either. You're sometimes presented with a chance to talk, but when you try, no words come out.

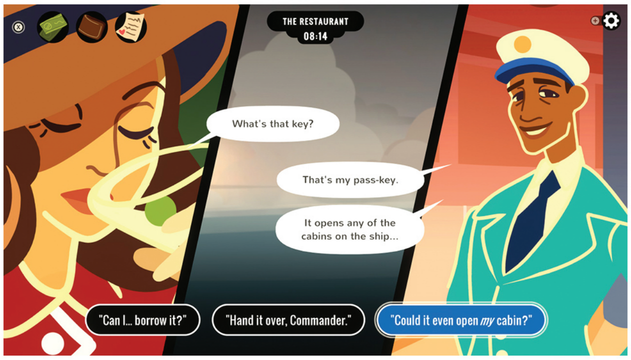
That changes when you find an old-fashioned Walkman and press play. The sound transports you to a magical place where a husky personal trainer and life coach teaches you all the different ways to say "NO!". When the tape ends, you head back to your corporate reality, armed with your new fighting words. (Well, it's technically one word, but you can say it in four different ways.) After that, it's not long before you make big changes to the office, the world and, most importantly, yourself.

If you've ever worked for a traditional for-profit company, the jokes hit home. Countless hit movies and TV shows have lampooned how corporate workspaces breed passive-aggressive power plays and selfishness veiled as professionalism, but few games have tackled the topic with such spot-on spoofing. While the grim reality of the subject could be a downer for some, the charming graphics and spritely music keep it light and playful, to the point where I wrongfully assumed that my 5-year-old son might want to play it too.

Boy was I wrong! Not only did he struggle to relate to the story, but he found the gameplay redundant in the context of his life. Why play a game about running around in circles and yelling "No!" at everyone when you already do the same thing in real life every day?

It's too bad that the game isn't more kid-friendly, because, from a mechanical perspective, it's perfect for younger players who like a little handholding. Like WiiWare's Muscle March and the PS1's Incredible Crisis, there's no free-roaming here, and the controls are super simple. That would be great if the game had even a lick of difficulty to it, but it's a game where you literally can't lose. There are no Game Overs – just slight delays in your inevitable move through the plot. By refusing to say "No!" to the player with an occasional fail state, the game leads you to feel like your choices don't matter. It's oddly disempowering for a game about taking charge, and the main reason why I can't give this a more enthusiastic "Yes!" **– J-NO-ATHAN**





Whodunnit? Youdunnit!

OVERBOARD!

IN OVERBOARD!, a narrative adventure game by Inkle, you take on the role of Veronica Villensey. And with a name like that, you can probably guess that you're not the hero of this story!

Veronica is an actress who's stuck in a loveless marriage. While on a voyage to New York in 1935, she finds a chance at freedom and pushes her husband Malcolm off the ship with no remorse and a perfect evil cackle.

She wakes up the next morning, and that's when the real challenge begins. Can Veronica escape the blame for the murder? Can she make it out with more than just her innocence? All that's up to you and your choices on the SS Hook.

Once you take control of Veronica, you have the entire ship at your disposal. You can move between its different areas, examine items and rooms and interact with other passengers, all while the excellent music and art design transport you back to the 1930s.

You only have eight in-game hours (around 20-40 minutes real time) to complete the necessary actions to avoid guilt. The passengers also have a set schedule and move around the ship, allowing them to find evidence against you or to be unavailable at certain times. Once your time is up, Veronica is confronted, and you find out whether your actions cleared her name or not. Then, you start all over.

My first few playthroughs had Veronica quickly thrown in the slammer, but they also revealed details I was able to use from there on out. For example, a passenger named Clarissa Turpentine suspects Veronica of murder right away and got her arrested on my first playthrough. But the next time, I knew I needed to cast doubt on Clarissa and her testimony.

In my next run, a passenger found one of Veronica's earrings on the deck, pinning her to the crime scene – so I knew I needed to take the time to retrieve that earring beforehand.

Each playthrough gives you more information and evidence to dispose of to make sure the crime can't be traced back to Veronica. It also clues you in about the passengers and their secrets, which you can use against them while conversing through dialogue choices. Of course, they can use your words against you too, so make sure to have your story straight!

I was able to get the blame off Veronica on my fourth run, but then the game divulges that getting freedom alone isn't the only successful ending for her.

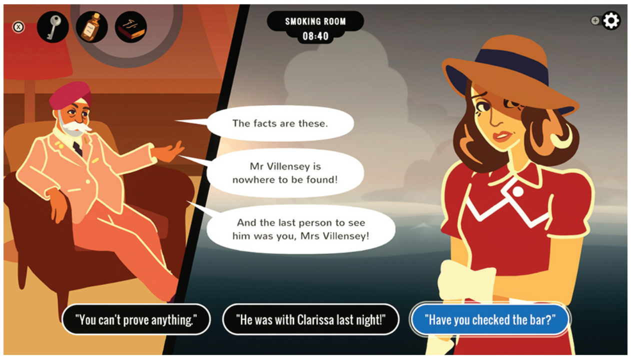
Overboard!'s structure allows its multiple playthroughs to stay fresh and engaging. You're essentially reliving the same eight hours, but they can play out differently depending on your decisions. The game also lets you fast-forward through the choices you've made already, which helps when you're replaying it.

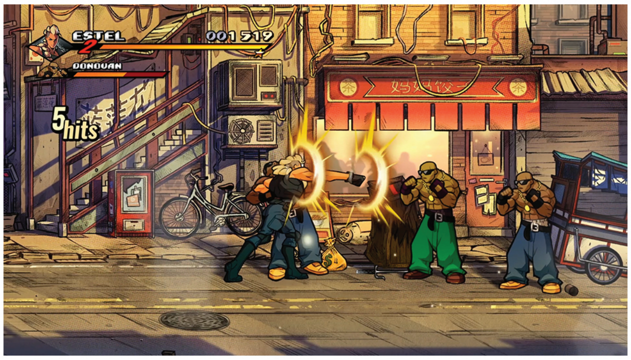
While there are many paths to take in Overboard!, they all lead to one of just a few endings. It took me about three hours of playing to get the best ending. After that, my motivation to keep going dropped despite the game giving me more objectives, including killing passengers and getting someone else to confess to murder. I think the game would've benefitted from either having more endings or making its endings more varied, so your choices could play more of a part in Veronica's fate.

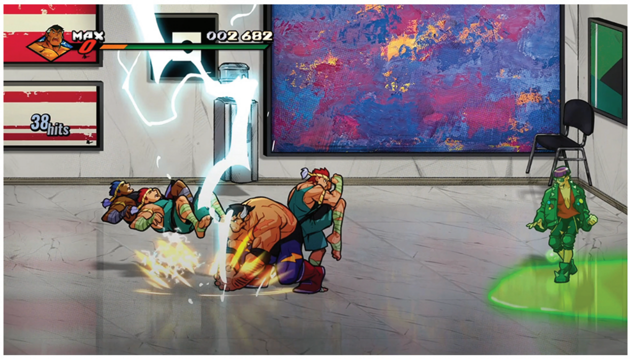
If you're ever feeling a bit villainous though or want to test your skills of manipulation, Overboard! is a fun one to dive into. **– MAGGIE**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INKLE RATING: T







Bringing the Thunder

STREETS OF RAGE 4: MR. X NIGHTMARE

WHEN I REVIEWED Streets of Rage 4 just over a year ago in this space, I found very few flaws in the game. And among those that were there, some seemed like nitpicking.

For instance, two playable characters from the original trilogy were featured as bosses, and even their 16-bit iterations were playable, but the new versions were not. In addition, a new character was introduced who felt like they were just waiting to be unlocked . . . but it never happened. The result was a certain sense of emptiness that prevented Streets of Rage 4, as good as it was, from feeling like a *complete* package.

Fast-forward to today, and the Mr. X Nightmare DLC. Now players can take control of Max Thunder, a former professional wrestler whose raw strength is awe-inspiring. Then there's Shiva, a martial artist who is probably the fastest in the game, but can't use weapons – at least in the traditional sense, as he performs a cool stomp that flips weapons into the air before kicking them like a bullet straight at enemies. Then there's the newcomer with no classic counterpart, Estel: a policewoman who's ready to chew bubblegum and kick butt (spoiler: she's all out of bubblegum), and she even brings with her the classic Streets of Rage 1 special move of summoning missile-toting backup.

Oh, and you can unlock the Streets of Rage 3 version of Roo by pressing Up and Y before pressing the Plus Button. The downside is he doesn't remain unlocked, so you have to do it each time.

Then there's the DLC's namesake: Mr. X Nightmare. If you haven't picked up SoR4 since it released last year, this one might slip right by you, as it's labelled as "Survival" on the main menu. There's a touch of lore added for the sake of a premise, with Dr. Zan using the twisted brain of Mr. X himself to create a virtual gauntlet for our heroes to fight through, keeping them prepared for anything and everything their old enemy can dream up.

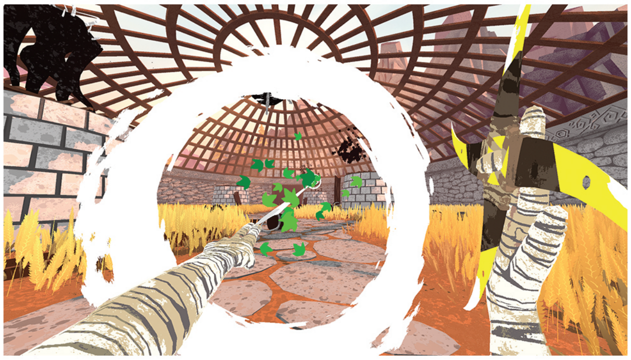
Whether you go for the weekly offering or the more randomized selection, you'll fight from one virtual environment to the next, taking up various weird, wacky and wild weapons to fend off foes old and new alike. At the end of each round, you'll get a choice of power-ups to carry forward, which increase your capabilities, but sometimes at a cost. Progress far enough in your one-life attempt, and you can unlock new skills and moves that are usable in the game's other modes. It's a fun way to keep things fresh while unlocking new features for this rather robust roster.

The best part is, while a number of Streets of Rage 4's modes and features need to be unlocked, everything here is ready to go as soon as you download it. Even if you're in the middle of the game, you can start hitting the streets with ample rage as any of the newly added characters. Just don't expect to see them actually interact in the story, as the cutscenes are fixed to our main four heroes.

Even if you don't spring for this DLC, a free patch has recently added alternate color schemes for all of the new/modern characters, as well as a new Mania+ difficulty and a training mode. Taken all together, the whole Streets of Rage 4 experience now finally does feel complete. **– DAVID**

DLC PUBLISHER: DOTEMU
DEVELOPERS: DOTEMU, GUARD CRUSH GAMES & LIZARDCUBE RATING: T

9.0



Fling and Be Flung

BOOMERANG X

OK, SO DID you ever see any of the episodes of Naruto that had Naruto's father fighting? His signature skill was that he could throw a kunai out – usually missing his opponent on purpose – but then he could instantly teleport himself to the weapon's new position to surprise and sneak attack his foe.

That's this.

The developers at Dang! (which is a great name for a game studio) have gameified that teleportation technique and crafted, for your consideration, Boomerang X.

This is a first-person boomerang-throwing action combat carnival. You wield a mystical, magical boomerang blessed with four whirling blades and the usual boomerang ability of returning right back to your hand a few seconds after you toss it. But it's got that teleporting function built in as well – if you don't wait for it to fly back to you but instead tap its same throw button a second time while it's still airborne, your character will instantly zip to its current position.

The result is dizzying. At first, at least. You get used to the rapid shifting of the scenery fairly quickly, and helpfully the teleporting power isn't entirely instananeous, as in Portal. You get a split second of seeing your character bolt straight through the air to catch up with the spinning blades. Still, it's lightning fast, and the gameplay is built around constant repeated uses of this power, such that you're flying, spinning, falling and flinging yourself around each arena in a nearly endless ballet of boomeranging bliss.

I say "arena" because that's the basic structure of the story here: You progress from one enclosed space to another, fighting to kill all the foes in each one in order to unlock the exit, then walk through that and some simple scenic hallway for a bit before entering the next arena and kicking into combat again. It's exceedingly simple.

The routine is only occasionally interrupted by stepping into tutorial chambers that grant you some new ability or brief scenes where you can optionally converse with a sentient centipede. Almost everything extraneous has been stripped away from Boomerang X in order to prioritize pure speed.

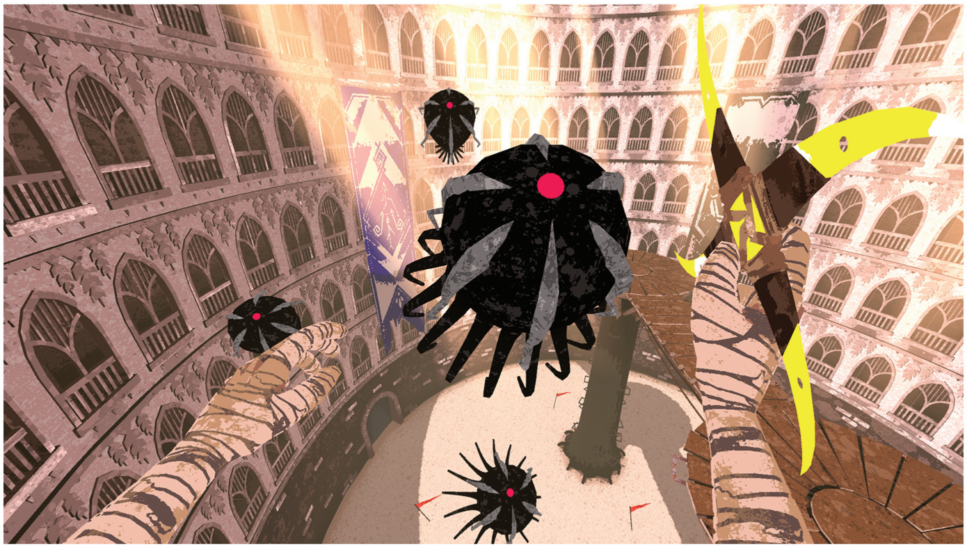
Did you watch any of the Summer Games Done Quick event this past July? If so, you surely saw this game being advertised quite a bit – it's clear that speedrunning aficionados are this game's target audience. I'm sure we'll see this game pop up at the next GDQ event, and the clear time will probably be something preposterously low, like 30 minutes, or even less. Partly because I can see how someone could get really good at this style of gameplay, but also because, well, even casually the game is quite short.

Only about a dozen combat arenas lie between you and victory, and one weekend's worth of time invested will surely carry you to the credits roll. That's a bit of a shame, as the foundation laid here could have been built upon to make something meatier – but the game is what it is, a speed challenge, and it does a spectacular job at being that.

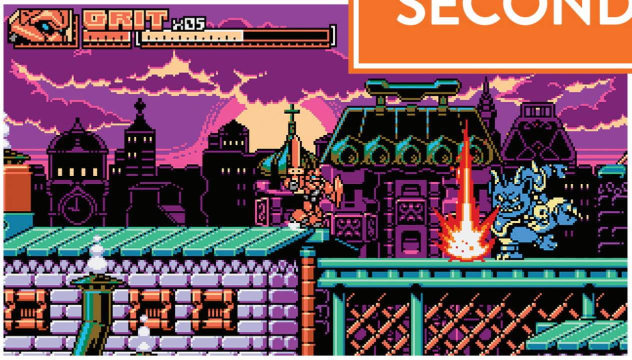
I recommend Boomerang X, but with one last caveat – consider its PC version before taking the plunge on Switch. I did well with this edition, but I think mouse-and-keyboard controls might have made me like it even more. **– LUCAS**

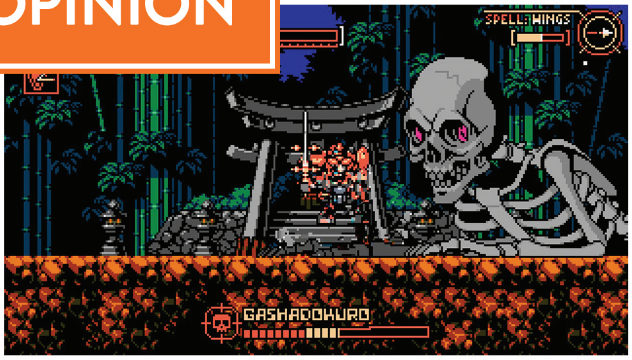
8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEVELOPER: DANG!
RATING: E10+



SECOND OPINION





Tribute's Mech Suit
PANZER PALADIN

WITH A TWO-PAGE preview, a review spread across two issues, an interview with developer Jonathan Lavigne and a wall poster of artwork from the game all appearing in past editions of NF, it's safe to say that we've given Panzer Paladin plenty of time in the spotlight already. So why bring it back around again? Well, because it's still the most recent Switch release from Tribute Games – and Tribute Games is the team that's currently working on Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge. Re-examining this game just might give us a bit of extra insight about the next one!

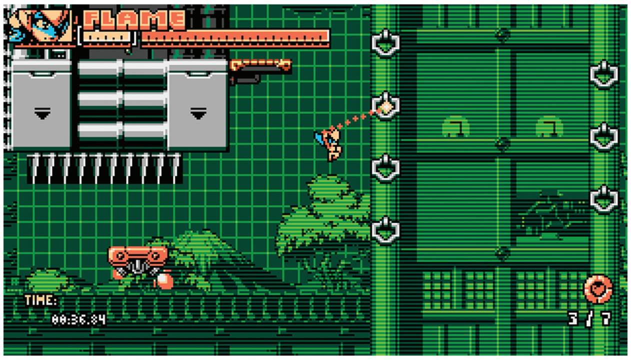
And, well, I hadn't played it yet myself. I put off my own Panzer play-through until my Limited Run Games-distributed physical copy got to me, which was only just recently. It took patience to wait for my Paladin to arrive!

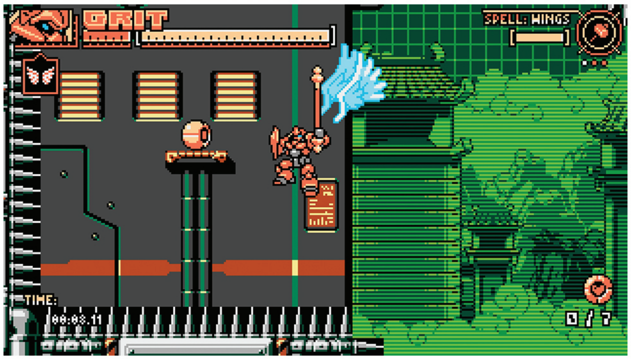
Which ended up being good training for playing the game itself, because this game is way tougher than I was expecting. It's not one you can just rush through on a first try. You've got to respect the complexity of the design – especially the inventory menu – if you hope to succeed.

Panzer Paladin casts you as a pair of heroes: a massive metal mech suit that has its own consciousness, Grit, as well as the human-sized android pilot, Flame, riding inside. Most of the time is spent controlling Grit, but some sequences call for Flame to disembark and proceed on foot. It's the classic Blaster Master approach that instantly raises your level of tension, because Flame is far less durable than her hulking robo pal. He can take a whole lot more hits.

. . . Most of the time. Again, the difficulty level of this game shocked me at first, because I began to play on the "Normal" setting and was just getting absolutely torn apart! Enemy hits were knocking massive chunks of hit points off Grit's HP meter – so much so that I backtracked to the main menu almost immediately to dial the difficulty down to "Easy."

8.0
CHRIS





Yet I still struggled even on that setting! Panzer Paladin pulls no punches, and there are serious difficulty spikes even when you've asked the game to ease off. I'll admit to getting frustrated to the point of just turning the game off and walking away on more than one occasion. Much of this game was built to resemble Nintendo's oldest console eras, with a limited color palette used in the graphics that gives it a look that lands somewhere between what the NES and SNES were capable of. I didn't realize that part of Tribute's tribute here was also bringing back the "Nintendo hard" challenge level from that era too!

Mastering the arsenal thankfully mitigates much of the challenge. Grit has no weapons to start – he can only throw short-range punches at first. Your inventory of weapons is assembled by grabbing the gear dropped from defeated foes (or sometimes finding weapons hidden in breakable walls, like Castlevania's classic wall meat). Each weapon is unique, in that some are longer than others, and some hit harder – but all eventually shatter from use. Yes, the brittleness of weapons so bemoaned in Breath of the Wild was adopted here as the core of the gameplay experience! However, breaking your weapons intentionally is another big gameplay mechanic. Whenever you do that, you unleash magic spells!

Defense Up. Attack Up. Buffs to the durability of your other weapons. Blasts of lightning raining down, or Heal spells to restore Grit's HP. All are in play, and each weapon has within it the power to cast one of them – so a major component of the Panzer Paladin experience is taking stock of your supply of weapons and picking the right ones to use against enemies, the right ones to shatter on purpose to cast the spells inside and even the right ones to sacrifice to activate the checkpoints in each level.

The checkpoint system is like an inverse of Shovel Knight's. The Blue Burrower could activate a checkpoint for free, but could then choose to break it and play more riskily for a treasure bonus. Here, checkpoints aren't activated at all unless you give up one of your weapons. No bonus available! What's worse, there are only two checkpoints in each stage, so you're looking at long stretches of territory to have to replay if you, say, fall in a pit right before reaching one of them.

Not that that happened to me!

(That happened to me.)

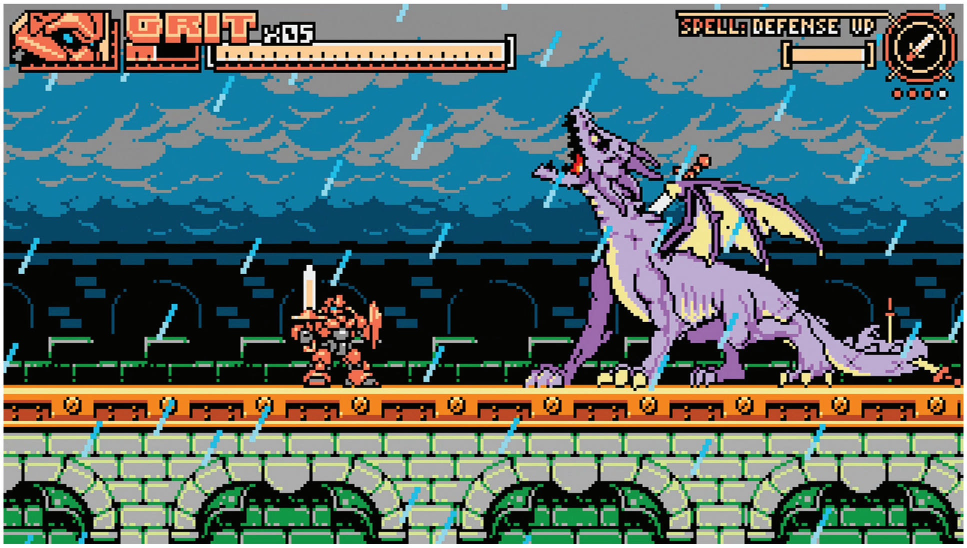
Honestly, I just had a lot more trouble with Panzer Paladin than I expected. Some other things that tripped me up were not always knowing which surfaces were safe to stand on, as a lot of background elements look like platforms, but aren't. And some sequences scroll the screen weirdly – I was scrolling downward once in what looked like a vertical descent, but then the scroll direction abruptly shifted to the left, so when I tried to move further down it just turned into falling into another pit trap. Good grief!

Ultimately, my enjoyment was less than Chris' was, I'm sure. But I don't want to diminish the excellence on display everywhere else here! The game looks phenomenal overall. Its soundtrack is absolutely fantastic – I'm listening to it again as I write this! I love the Mega Man-inspired stage select that lets you play the 10 main levels in any order you want, and the fact that each level takes place in a different part of planet Earth, and the weapons you find in each place are all culturally appropriate. That's all amazing.

As for what we could learn about Shredder's Revenge from this game? Well, I'm going to be on alert for a more serious level of challenge than most Turtles brawlers, and hope that if they offer an adjustment down to "Easy" there, that it truly will be easy to play when picked. I'd hate to get too frustrated again! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: TRIBUTE GAMES RATING: T

7.5
LUCAS



The Penultimate Addition

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: CHALLENGER PACK 10

FOR OVER TWO decades, Smash fans have been able to reliably play the games in the series with a largely unchanged control setup. At least, that was the case until the last two entries, when guest characters from other fighting series joined in the fray! Brawlers hailing from Street Fighter, The King of Fighters and even Nintendo's own ARMS arrived with unique control schemes and gameplay rules pulled straight from their source material.

Now, on the eve of the ultimate Smash Ultimate DLC character, Tekken's own Kazuya Mishima has joined the fight. It firmly feels like almost all the big leaguers of fighting games have been immortalized in the living museum that is Super Smash Bros. (with apologies to Mortal Kombat).

Kazuya's presence here feels like a long-anticipated addition to the cadre of fighting game giants like Ryu and Terry. At the same time, it also feels like one final thank you from Nintendo to Namco Bandai, the co-developers of the last three releases in the series. While Pac-Man may represent Namco's strange and historic past, the Tekken series is more emblematic of the company's current stylish and modern future.

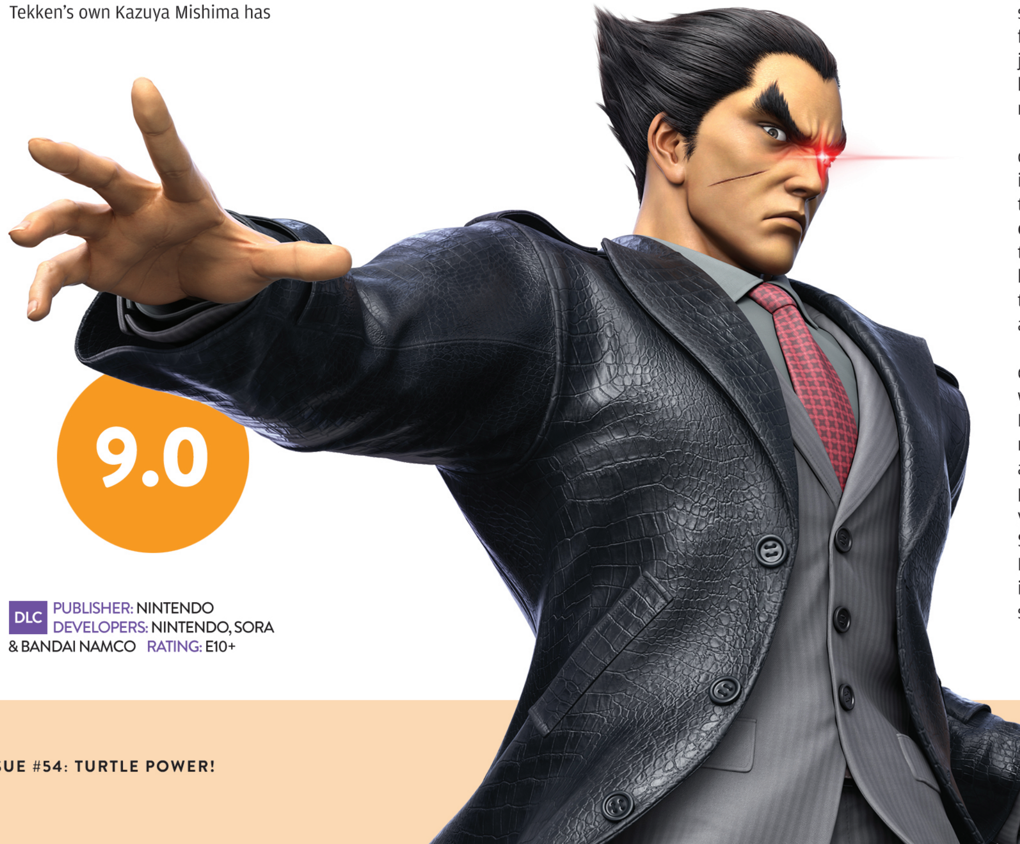
Smash adapted the control styles of other fighting games by mapping buttons to the length of time the Smash and special buttons were held down, but Kazuya's implementation once again breaks the established mold of the Smash tradition in a surprising twist.

The control stick is used to turn Kazuya into an eight-way directional fighter, with slight tilts and taps executing pieces of some truly vicious close quarters automatic combos on hit confirmations. If you've played modern fighters like Dragon Ball FighterZ with more accessible one-button combos, it honestly feels a lot like this in practice.

The heir to the Mishima fortune has some more tricks up his sleeve, however. By tapping into his latent Devil Genes – it's worth doing a Wiki dive into Tekken's lore, by the way, it gets buck wild – Kazuya can unleash a far-reaching angled laser, armored attacks, and even sprout demonic wings for some extra height. While he feels surprisingly heavy, this is justified by Kazuya's immense strength. He's designed to draw his foes in close and eliminate them with just a few well placed combos . . . the highest risk for the highest possible reward.

Kazuya may be somewhat intimidating to novice Smash players, after it even took me, a veteran, a protracted weekend to just get a handle on his full moveset. If you already tend to favor the heavy hitters, however, you may find Kazuya easier to pick up compared to the lighter and speedier Ryu and Ken.

Alongside the character comes a destructible dojo stage (complete with a cameo by the patriarchal Heihachi) and an impressive 39 music tracks. If you're buying Kazuya alone, it's certainly one heck of a package for just $5.99, especially if you're looking for a new challenge in Smash. Though, the full Fighters Passes still remain a pleasingly solid investment for avid Smashers of any skill level. **– JOHN-CHARLES**



9.0

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, SORA & BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+

REST 0

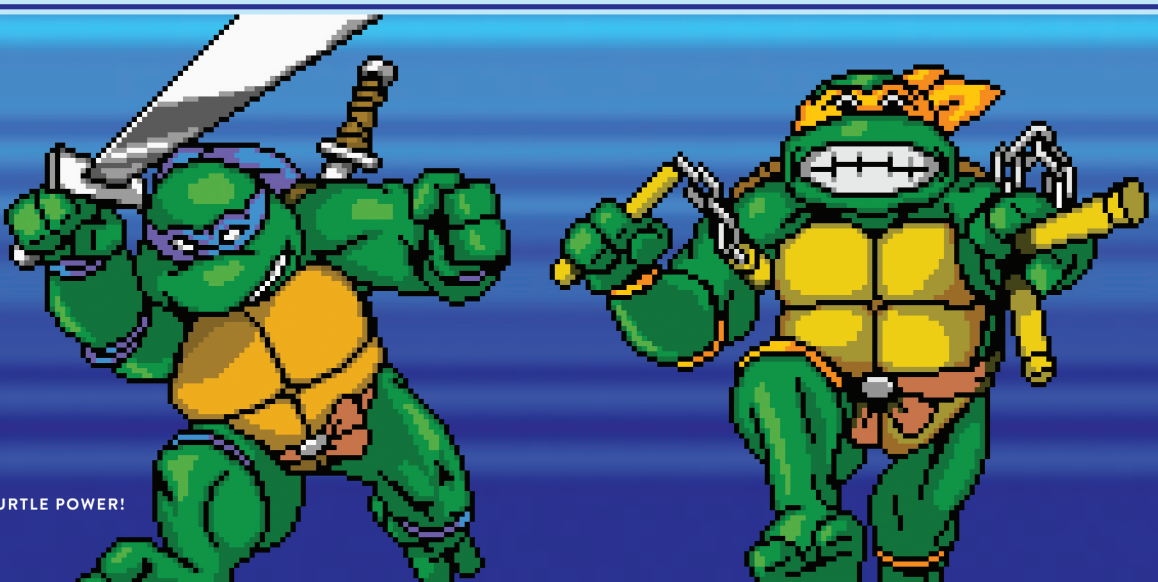
the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

TURTLES THROUGH TIME

Shredder's Revenge is nearly upon us. But what is it that he's so mad about, anyway? Let's look back across the decades to revisit the many defeats he's been dealt in the past by the Heroes in a Half Shell . . . in Nintendo video games!



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

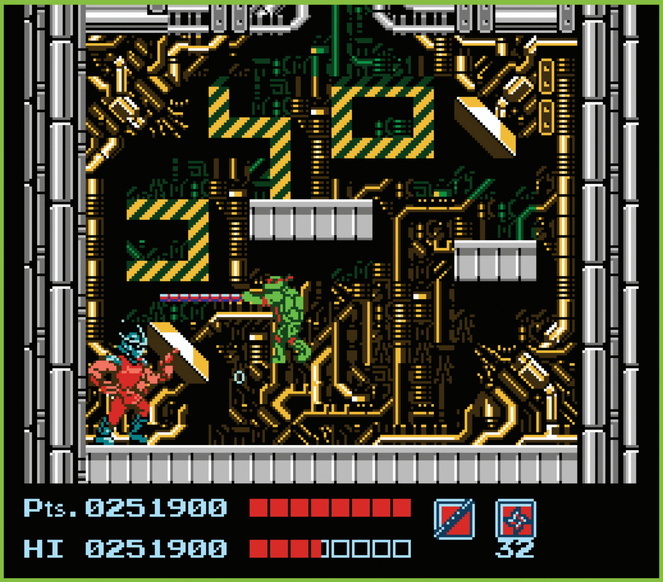
THOUGH LOOKED BACK upon in a harsher light these days, the first Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game to come from Konami on the NES was a smash hit in its day, selling more than 4,000,000 copies! Its arrival was timely, too, as it arrived right as Turtlemania was picking up steam.

The game featured a variety of elements from across the different branches of the fledgling franchise. Despite having a cover taken straight from the independent comics by Mirage Studios, most of the aesthetic seemed to be driven by the Playmates toy line, which had also prompted a cartoon series. The cast only consisted of those characters featured in the first wave of toys, along with appearances from the Mousers, Party Wagon, Turtle Blimp and Technodrome, leaving Konami to fill out the rest of the Foot Clan's ranks with a bizarre assortment of strange villainous types that would, for the most part, never be seen again.

While many of the Turtles' most popular games have featured multiplayer over the years, this original NES adventure was strictly a solo affair. However, this put control of all four Turtles in the hands of a single player, who could switch between them at any time, and each brought unique strengths and weaknesses to the table in the form of their signature weapons. Raphael's popularity among fans didn't quite translate into the game, as while he was the fastest with his sai, his attacks were also the weakest. On the other end of the spectrum, Donatello has proven consistently popular with players, as his bo staff might be slow, but it also sports the strongest attack power and range.

According to Digital Foundry, the developers had hoped to create more differentiation between the four Turtles with regards to their abilities, but they didn't have time to implement it. Fortunately, later titles in the franchise would get to play with this "Radical" idea further in due time.

The core gameplay had players move around an overworld map for five of the six levels, and would switch to a sidescrolling view as the Turtles ventured into buildings and sewers on their quest to put an end to the Shredder and retrieve his "Life Transformer Gun." Very few players ever reached the final confrontation seen below, though, as this game was torturously difficult for most who attempted it. Many never made it past its infamous swimming stage – which was just the second level! **– DAVID**



RELEASED: NES, JUNE 1989 PUBLISHER: ULTRA GAMES DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: FALL OF THE FOOT CLAN

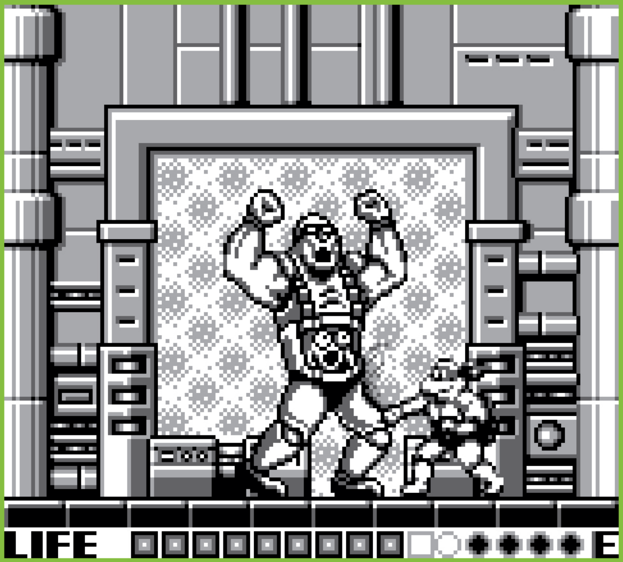
AFTER PLAYING THE first Turtles arcade game, I started watching the cartoon and trying to find other games to play. Then, after failing miserably when I rented the original NES game, I snagged the first Game Boy title for a road trip. Fall of the Foot Clan from Ultra Games was a totally different ball game compared to the arcade title I fell in love with, but I learned to love this one – perhaps driven by the fact it was one of only a few titles I had for that trip, and it was the newest.

I remember initially being alarmed by how much real estate my chosen Ninja Turtle took up on the Game Boy screen. You could pick a different Turtle to play for each of the five stages, with the only real discernable difference being the weapon they used. Donatello and Leonardo made the most sense, as their weapons had the most reach, and that seemed to matter more than anything in the game. I never noticed Mikey or Raph having more attack power for having to get so close to strike, as nearly everything blew up after just one hit anyway.

It also played like walking through molasses. Light platforming combined with attacking the titular Foot Clan foes was the gimmick from start to finish. Each level had a boss: first Rocksteady, then Bebop, Baxter Stockman, Shredder and finally Krang in the Technodrome. The highlight of completing a level was seeing the beautiful pixel art along with text about the rudimentary story: April is kidnapped and taken by Shredder and Krang and the Turtles have to get her back.

The Turtle you picked tended to stay in the middle of the screen as you went through the level, with enemies spawning to the left and right. There were a few different types of Foot Soldier that could do different attacks, and the levels were positively swimming with them. Mousers, Roadkill Rodneys, Tubular Transports and even local fauna made up other baddies to vanquish. If your Turtle ran out of their life bar, they would be out of commission and another brother would have to take over, so you essentially had four "lives" to run through the game. Pizza power-ups tended to come just in time, but it was never terribly challenging.

It was a fun, short and simple game from a simpler time, and while it doesn't hold up very well today, it still brings a sense of nostalgia to me. And childhood road trip memories! **– BRETT**



RELEASED: GAME BOY, AUGUST 1990 PUBLISHER: ULTRA GAMES DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE ARCADE GAME

FOR THOSE OBSESSED with the cartoon and action figures, the release of the TMNT arcade game was an Earth-shattering event. For the first time outside the comics, kids got to see the Ninja Turtles actually using their weapons to battle hordes of Foot Soldiers, mutants, and more, and it somehow looked even better than the cartoon it was based on!

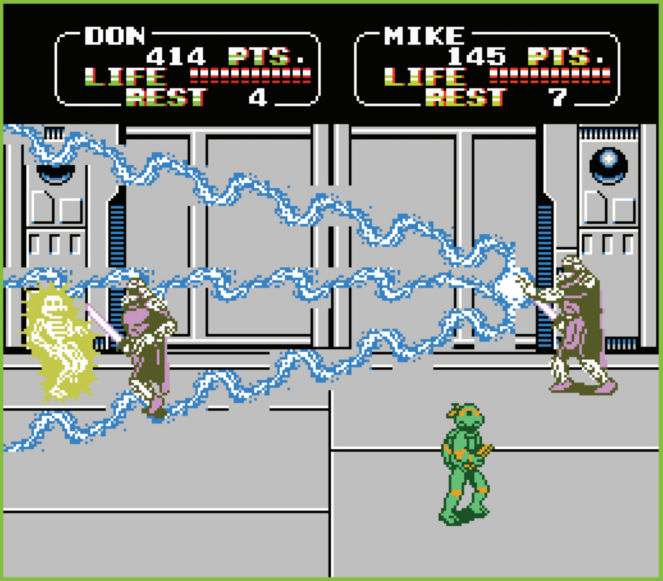
Konami quickly set to work squeezing all that arcade action into a mere NES cart, and in Issue #21 of Nintendo Power, kids everywhere lost their minds at the sight of a conversion that looked too good to be true. Sure, the visuals weren't quite up to par with the arcade game itself, and the player count was slashed from four to two, but the spirit of the original was on full display, and its simple yet fun beat-'em-up gameplay was far more welcoming than the too-complicated NES game that came before it.

This was no straight port job either. Konami took the limitations of the NES into account, resulting in a game that works far better than a direct conversion ever could. The difficulty was adjusted to be more fair since munching quarters was no longer a concern, and since there were fewer enemies allowed on the screen at a time, the stages themselves were made longer. Not only that, but there were even two all-new areas and a pair of exclusive bosses created just for this release!

The title suggests this is a sequel to the first NES game, but the story strangely combines it with elements of the 1990 movie, with Shredder surviving being dropped in the back of a garbage truck, then floating on a raft of styrofoam cups to safety where he used his Translocation Matrix Beam to travel through space and hire a pair of intergalactic bounty hunters named Tora and Shogun to help him get revenge on the Turtles, then zap back to Earth and kidnap April to use as bait. Makes total sense!

In the end, the Turtles beat up Shredder and his dopplegängers, then blow up the Technodrome for good measure. As a reward for sending him back to the scrap heap, players could use the included real-life coupon for a free Personal Pan Pizza from Pizza Hut!

It may not have been able to match the feeling of standing in front of an arcade cabinet with three friends, but TMNT II was still a Turtle fan's dream come true. – **KRIS**



RELEASED: NES, DECEMBER 1990 PUBLISHER: ULTRA GAMES DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: BACK FROM THE SEWERS

NOT CONTENT WITH just one handheld romp, the Turtles next came back from the sewers in search of action and pizza! Like Mario's handheld sequel before it, this sequel took everything good about its predecessor and supercharged it: larger and more expressive characters, digitized voices, memorable stages and a rockin' soundtrack. Cowabunga indeed!

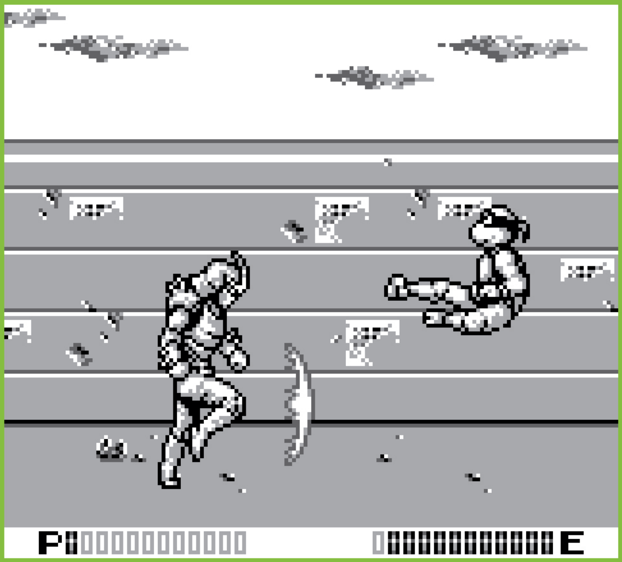
As usual, Shredder and his innumerable Foot Soldiers have taken April O'Neil captive, and players can pick their favorite Turtle to go to town and save the day. The combat is reasonably straightforward, but with some interesting wrinkles such as a sliding attack and some new maneuverability options, and each of the teens has his own attributes regarding speed and range. This time around, Leo and Mike are the balanced brothers, Don brings the long-reaching bo at the cost of some speed, and poor Raph is stuck with stubby weaponry to balance out his quicker feet. Each of these bodacious bros represents one life, though the remaining Turtles do get a chance to rescue fallen bros via an optional boss battle between stages.

Like its precursor, Fall of the Foot Clan, Back from the Sewers is more of a sidescrolling hack-'n-slash than a beat-'em-up. Make no mistake though – this pocket-sized adventure still packs plenty of creativity in its relatively brief runtime.

For instance, the first stage features not only multiple sewer and surface transitions, but a collapsing set of pipework that the Turtles have to escape as it crumbles around them. Another level tasks players to circle back on themselves in a tricky bit of maze navigation; later stages involve clambering across airborne platforms in a daring rescue mission, culminating with a pursuit of the Technodrome itself as it tunnels through the Earth. There are even a few classic, angled beat-'em-up-styled areas, including the requisite surfing sections!

Of special note are the bosses, a rogues' gallery of challenging and varied climaxes to each level. The usual ruffians are here: Rocksteady, Bebop and General Tragg to name a few. And of course, Shredder – always causing trouble – makes appearances in both standard and Super Shredder forms, though he's usurped as the final boss by Super Krang!

All things considered, Back from the Sewers is not a long game, but it's consistently interesting and packed with Turtle Power! – **MATTHEW T.**



RELEASED: GAME BOY, DECEMBER 1991 PUBLISHER: ULTRA GAMES DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

A LITTLE OVER one year after the smash hit of the ported Turtles arcade game on NES, a sequel of sorts was made. Being toward the end of the NES life cycle may have hurt its overall sales numbers, but it benefited greatly on what they were able to do during development: Rather than reuse sprites and pump out a simpler sequel, Konami decided to use all-new sprites, add a rockin' soundtrack and present their own, original, absolutely outlandish Ninja Turtles scenario!

The premise had the Turtles on vacation when Shredder strikes and somehow "steals" all of Manhattan by making it into a floating island, then sends the Foot Clan to crash our heroes' getaway. Rocksteady meets the brothers on the beach with a harpoon gun as the first boss. After that was a surfing level – and the boss here blew my tween mind.

The cartoon had *just* introduced two of my favorite mutants in the series: Groundchuck the Bull and Dirtbag the Mole. The second boss, rather than the entirely expected Bebop, was Groundchuck! How did they coordinate with the show so well? I fully expected to see Dirtbag next, and sure enough, he made his video game boss battle debut as well.

Synergy with the Saturday morning show wasn't the only shock here, though. Late in the game, the cartoon connections gave way to a movie tie-in: Tokka and Rahzar, the mutant snapping turtle and wolf from the live-action film TMNT II: Secret of the Ooze, appeared as well! Clearly the developers were deeply ingrained in the Turtle culture of the era and made great efforts for this game to be as timely as possible.

Tokka and Rahzar didn't attack as a duo – the limitations of the aging NES hardware kept that kind of clash off the table until the following generation of the Super Nintendo. Still, one Super moment happened here: After taking down Krang, the surprise final boss, leaping out of the final minutes of the Secret of the Ooze movie, was Super Shredder! A battle with "normal" Shredder had already taken place earlier in the quest, so this was another massive shock for Turtle-crazed kids of the early '90s. No matter how many times the Shredder attacked, though, the Turtles always prevailed – then escaped via their incredibly conspicuous blimp as the floating island of Manhattan safely returned to its original spot. **– BRETT**

RELEASED: NES, FEBRUARY 1992 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME

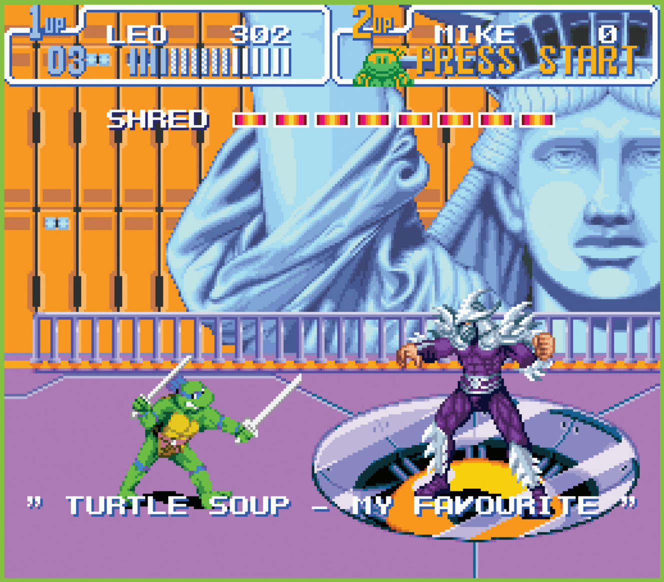
THE TIME, AS they say, was right. It was the early '90s, Turtlemania was bigger than ever and home consoles were finally starting to catch up to arcades in displaying huge, gorgeous spritework. While TMNT II on the NES did an admirable job replicating the coin-op experience, Turtles in Time is a practically indistinguishable port. Never before had the colorful TMNT world been so well-realized in a game – certainly not on a home system – and the presentation was just the first part of why Turtles in Time has become one of the most beloved beat-'em-ups ever made!

While it does lack the arcade version's 4P mode and a few audiovisual details, it's often considered by fans to still be the definitive edition of the game for its other benefits. Namely, it's got more consistent controls, a gnarly versus mode, four new boss fights (including fan favorites Bebop and Rocksteady) and an extra stage! That's right, the classic Technodrome can only be experienced in the SNES version of Turtles in Time.

Fittingly, Shredder himself awaits at the end of this level, and he's vulnerable to one of the most entertaining and memorable moves in Turtles history: hurling your enemies directly at the screen! Because ol' Shred-Head is positioned in the foreground, it's up to the boys to deliver a swift Foot to the face to take him down! (See Page 55!)

So is that where the game ends? Not likely, dude! Shredder's got a trick up his spiky sleeve: opening up a time portal to wreak havoc throughout history. What follows is a varied romp through Pangaea, a pirate ship, the Wild West and the neon-lit future world of . . . 2020!? (I guess fighting Covid wouldn't be as exciting as Krang's mech suit.) One way or another, these diverse second-act locales give the game a shot in the arm to help it avoid the repetition problem that plagues many lesser brawlers.

Between the constant surprises, fine-tuned combat, Saturday morning-caliber presentation and excellent pacing, it's no mystery why this game is the one that's been the biggest influence on the upcoming Shredder's Revenge. Turtles in Time is still one radical brawler that's arguably the best this series (and some would argue, this *genre*) has seen to date. If you've never played it, call for a buddy – and a pizza – and get ready for a shell-kicking good time! **– MATTHEW T.**



RELEASED: SNES, AUGUST 1992 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS

CO-OP BRAWLERS WERE on the way out and competitive fighters were on the way in by 1993. This was true in arcades, on home consoles and, of course, in the Turtle-verse. So instead of another beat-'em-up, the follow-up to Turtles in Time on the SNES was TMNT: Tournament Fighters, a Street Fighter II clone on the SNES . . . and the NES?

Wait a minute, wasn't the NES dead by this point? Not to Turtles fans! The original TMNT game on the NES was one of the best-selling games in the console's history. Walking away from those players would have been cold-blooded. Instead, Konami shelled out more greenbacks for a multi-console release – at the latest possible point – making this the last third-party game ever published on Nintendo's resilient little 8-bit system.

The NES game feels like a prequel to the bigger, more fully featured SNES title. (At least, in hindsight. Its release actually trailed its big bro's, as it slipped into 1994!) The NES campaign mode allows you to choose one of the four familiar turtle boys before battling your ninja brothers, then Casey Jones and Hothead (a fireman turned dragon-man from the Turtles' comics and toy line), before taking on who else but The Shredder himself.

"Who else?" was the question that the developers on the SNES game actually decided to answer. In a shocking twist, Shredder is not the last boss of the 16-bit game! Instead, he joined an expansive starting roster of playable characters, including Aska (an all-new fighter based on Mitsu from the third TMNT movie), Chrome Dome (a Shredder-style robot from the cartoon series) and a handful of colorful monsters from the Archie Turtles comics (including War, Wingnut and Armaggon).

Surprisingly, Casey Jones and Hothead from the NES game sat this one out, and were replaced with bosses like The Rat King and . . . Karai?! Sometimes known as the Lady Shredder, she was new to almost everyone, having just been introduced in the T-rated Turtles comic from Mirage in 1992. Leaping from total nobody to last boss was no small feat of gymnastic ninjutsu! Though the games never explain how she pulled this off, it's guessed that she ousted her father, The (Not-Lady) Shredder, from the role of main villain after his loss to the Turtles in the NES game. Another embarrassment for the sad Oroku Saki! **– JONATHAN**

RELEASED: SNES, SEPTEMBER 1993; NES, FEBRUARY 1994 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: RADICAL RESCUE

WHILE THE TURTLES' first two portable outings were relatively basic action platformers, Radical Rescue was surprisingly ambitious in its design. This time, the game played out as an exploratory adventure akin to something like Metroid!

Shredder is back, and he's kidnapped April O'Neil, Splinter, Raphael, Donatello and Leonardo. That's right, he's managed to successfully snatch up every main character except Michelangelo, who only evaded capture because he was out getting a slice of pizza!

Oh, and Shredder's a cyborg now. Because why not?

Things begin outdoors with a straightforward platformer style, but Mikey quickly finds himself in a gigantic fortress with multiple branching paths, which is where the remainder of the game plays out. You start off with a full map at your disposal, which thankfully comes with important locations already marked. These contain boss battles, keys and, most importantly, your brothers.

Unlike in Metroid where the items you find award you more exploration options, it's the other Turtles and their individual abilities that help you get around this game's enormous labyrinth. Leonardo can use his swords to drill down through certain floors; Donatello can climb up and down walls; Raphael can retreat into his shell to squeeze through tight areas; and Michelangelo can use his nunchucks to hover like a helicopter.

As for the bosses themselves, they consist of a pretty interesting set of characters. While Dirtbag and the Triceraton appeared in the cartoon and/or comics well before this game, the other bosses, Scale Tail and Scratch, were both based off of Playmates' action figure line. Scratch in particular remains one of the most sought-after TMNT toys ever made!

The game culminates in a boss rush that's obviously inspired by Mega Man, with a showdown against Cyber Shredder at the end. Once defeated, he drops the last key so you can finally free April and go home. As for the fate of Cyber Shredder, that's left ambiguous at best, as he just sort of unceremoniously falls off the screen, never to be seen again.

Radical Rescue can be a real challenge, and the Game Boy's tiny screen was no help with exploration. Still, it's hard not to respect how much this game tries to do, especially considering what came before! **– KRIS**

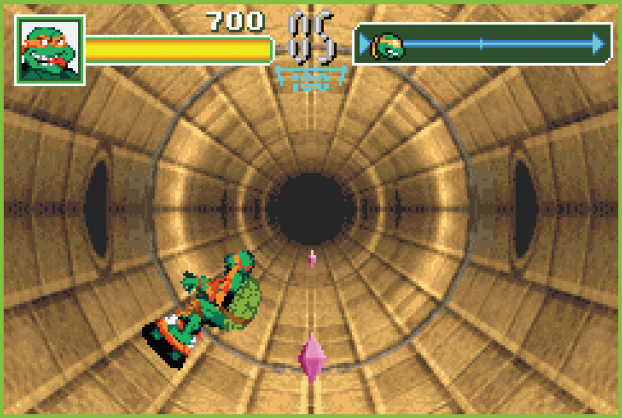
RELEASED: GAME BOY, NOVEMBER 1993 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

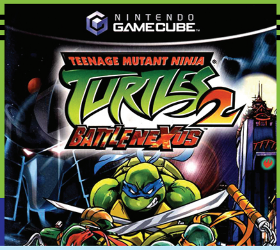
FOLLOWING THE RELEASE of Tournament Fighters' NES version, the TMNT brand went dark for nearly a decade. The games didn't kick back into gear until 2003, when there was an all-new, rebooted cartoon to adapt! The '03 Turtles toon was a bit more serious than the previous animated series, drawing its stories from the original comics and not spending quite as much time prioritizing toy sales.

Two games, both just called Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, got the bros back into action on both the GameCube and Game Boy Advance. The Cube game was their first 3D adventure: a two-player co-op brawler that was not well received in its day. Still, Konami's faithfulness in adapting the '03 cartoon was admirable, as the game followed the plot of its first season, included animated cutscenes and brought in the same voice cast.

More appreciated was the GBA game, a sidescrolling single-player quest that carried on Radical Rescue's concept of giving each bro a unique move for exploration. Each Turtle got his own unique story levels, too, as well as personal bonus stages – Mikey's played like the bonus stages from Sonic 2! This was a better way to declare that TMNT was back. **— LUCAS**



RELEASED: CUBE & GBA, OCTOBER 2003 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI (& HUDSON SOFT)



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS

WASTING NO TIME whatsoever, both 2003 titles instantly got direct sequels exactly one year later. The Battle Nexus games blasted the Turtles out of New York and into outer space, chronicling their time spent competing in an alien gladiator arena!

The big selling point for the GameCube game this time around was . . . four-player support! That critical component of the coin-op experience had been cut in every home version before this, so Battle Nexus claimed the crown as the first home game to let you and three friends all control a different Turtle at the same time. You could even unlock the original arcade game! (Albeit with altered audio.) Sadly, the rest of Battle Nexus was dismal, as the enemy A.I. was laughable, the play control was sloppy and it forced all four players to share a single life bar. What in the world?

Once again the handheld counterpart fared better in comparison, as Battle Nexus GBA skillfully brought the brothers into true ninja territory with stealth sequences! (It's about time they listened to Splinter and hid in the shadows.) Maybe Konami's Metal Gear team got involved? **— LUCAS**

RELEASED: CUBE & GBA, OCTOBER 2004 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI (& HUDSON SOFT)

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANT MELEE

ON THE BOX of the SNES version of TMNT: Tournament Fighters, Konami decided to include some outlandishly laughable marketing text that said "No street fighter has ever seen fighters or fighting like this!" – wow. Still, you've got to give them credit for coming right out and shouting from the rooftops that the game inside was a shameless Street Fighter clone.

That practice of thinly veiling the reality of TMNT games' design direction has continued over the years – we're just a few page flips away from seeing both "Smash-Up" and "Brawl" games starring the half-shell heroes. The series' first attempt at riding the coattails of Nintendo's Super Smash Bros. series came here in 2005, though, when three and a half years after the release of Super Smash Bros. Melee, Konami gifted unto us the glory of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Melee.

Please here the deep sarcasm in my words of praise there; this release is one of the worst the TMNT brand has ever been attached to. Sitting at a comfortable 44% rating on Metacritic, Mutant Melee was firebombed by the critics of 2005. Nintendo Power, in their June 2005 issue, came in with a score even lower than that, awarding it just a 42 (as an average of five different reviewers' ratings) and giving it only a single paragraph of text for its review. Their highest praise? "Controls are slightly sluggish."

On paper, Mutant Melee's design didn't seem like a bad fit for the TMNT franchise. It's an "arena fighter" in line with the likes of Capcom's Power Stone series – brawling battles take place in 3D, but within the bounds of fairly confined spaces. Power Stone and its sequel did wonders working with those restrictions and became stand-out hits in the Dreamcast library . . . but in trying to clone their appeal, Mutant Melee made the major misstep of having its arenas be too bland, boring and noninteractive.

This is a game in which Leo, Mikey, Donnie and Raph are thrown into a series of barely decorated rectangles and are asked to just button-mash basic attacks to defeat the foes inside, after which they're rewarded by being shuffled off into the next rectangle to do it all again. There are some fun ideas here, like a King of the Hill mode in which you have to stay inside a small glowing circle within the arena to score points. And Shredder is playable, so you can control him charging into the Lair to slice and dice the heroes. But overall, this was no match for the real Melee. **– LUCAS**

RELEASED: CUBE, MARCH 2005 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 3: MUTANT NIGHTMARE

AND NOW BACK to the "same name, different game" console and handheld dual releases! By the end of 2005, the DS had overtaken the GBA as Nintendo's primary portable, so the Turtles made their debut there with TMNT 3: Mutant Nightmare. In chronicling the many times Shredder has tried and failed to defeat our heroes, this game marks his most insane attempt: transforming himself into the massive abomination known as Mega Shredder! Just look at that absolute unit. He truly lost his mind!

Back on the GameCube, the 3D brawler design established by the 2003 title and carried on by Battle Nexus was iterated again, to the surprise of no one and the dismay of many. Some improvements were made, to be fair, like the Turtles actually getting separate life bars again, but it was clear that Konami's console team just wasn't doing justice to the TMNT name any more. They conceded that point themselves, letting their license lapse: Mutant Nightmare was Konami's last Turtles title. **– LUCAS**

RELEASED: CUBE & DS, NOVEMBER 2005 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

TMNT

THE ERA OF the 2003 cartoon Turtles came to an end with the introduction of another new animated take on the characters in the 2007 film that was called simply "TMNT." The movie was unique in that it carried on the story of the versions of the Turtles who had first appeared in the live-action film trilogy in the early '90s, but it totally swapped visual styles to feature computer-generated animation. This marked the first time the characters had become CGI creations, which, when it came time to create video games based on the new film, seemed like it might make the move to another medium a little easier.

And it kind of did! While not up to the high-definition standards of today and certainly not a match for the visual quality of the movie, the Turtles made the transition to Nintendo's three active 3D-capable systems – the GameCube, the Wii and even the DS – fairly faithfully. In particular, the leaner, nimbler and more fluid animation of the bros in the film made their video game counterparts more fun and agile to control in motion than ever before.

Ubisoft took over development for the series beginning with this game, and it's clear that their first instinct was just to look at their then-recent 3D reboot of the Prince of Persia series and give that style of gameplay a TMNT coat of paint. It wasn't a bad idea, as it resulted in the coolest ninja movement yet for our heroes, as they ran on walls, flipped from pipes and didn't just plod along on foot any more. The DS game, while not nearly as good as the home console versions, at least tried to capture that sense of motion too with rhythm-fueled rooftop running sequences. **– LUCAS**

RELEASED: CUBE, Wii & DS, MARCH 2007 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: UBISOFT

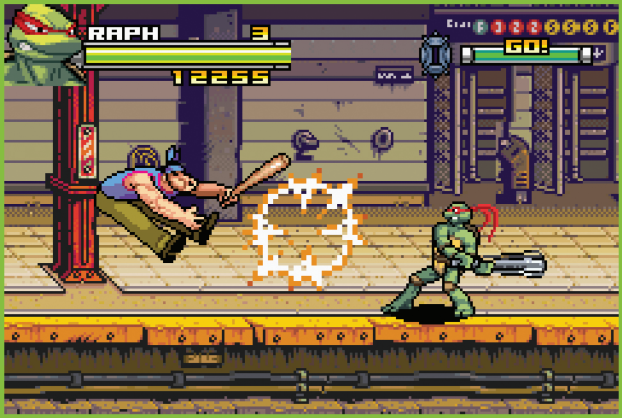
TMNT

UBISOFT'S 2007 TMNT titles set the series' record for the number of games with the same name shipping to different platforms. There were actually four different versions of "TMNT" just on Nintendo's systems! The one that deserves individual attention above all, though, is the Game Boy Advance version.

Putting aside the others' Prince of Persia inspiration, TMNT for GBA seemingly decided to draw upon a different video game: River City Ransom (a move echoed years later with Ubisoft's Scott Pilgrim vs. The World game). Whether by design or coincidence, this meant that the core gameplay was also more similar to the many beat-'em-up brawlers produced by the license's former holders at Konami – but with additions such as experience points, money, shops and picking up extra weapons to use in addition to the quartet's signature ninja gear.

Rather than using the same CGI-rendered visual style as the movie it's based on, this TMNT kept things a little more old-school by going the hand-drawn pixel art route for its backgrounds and sprites alike (though cutscenes were stills lifted straight from the film and digitized). It's a fairly lengthy adventure for its type, too, with the first act alone taking the better part of 10 minutes to complete! Lucky there are three save slots!

In the end, TMNT for GBA proved that old-school was still cool by reviewing much better than its more prominent counterparts. **– DAVID**



RELEASED: GBA, MARCH 2007 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: UBISOFT

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SMASH-UP

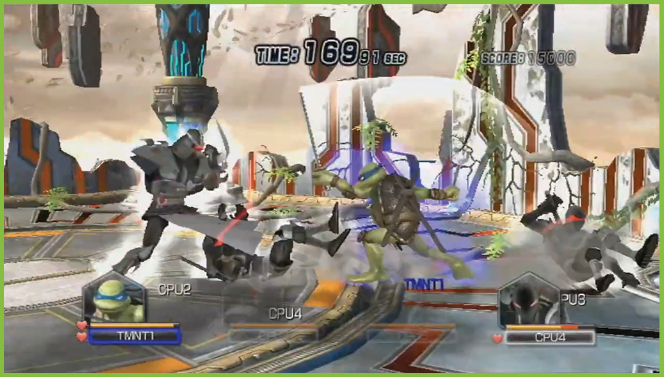
WHAT DO YOU get when you take the gameplay of Super Smash Bros., bring in the co-developers of Super Smash Bros. Brawl, add a bit of former Team Ninja zest and paint the whole thing Turtle green?

You get Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Smash-Up, a TMNT 25th anniversary Smash Bros.-like game that is arguably Ubisoft's best effort with the license while it was in their care (it's between this and their GBA game).

Unlike the vast majority of TMNT games, Smash-Up is based on no *specific* iteration of the Turtles, but rather draws from several. To wit: The visual style is pulled from the CGI movie, while the cutscenes are drawn in the style of the original comics from Mirage (and illustrated by longtime TMNT penciller, Jim Lawson). Meanwhile, the voices come from the 4Kids animated series, and – for good measure – one of the backgrounds features the Technodrome from the 1987 cartoon. Apparently, "Smash-Up" wasn't just a reference to the gameplay!

Though the game was also released on the PlayStation 2 (as was the style at the time), the Wii version was where it was really at. In addition to an online mode that was pretty good for the Wii (and in this writer's experience, ran more smoothly than Brawl's online play), there were also four Wii-exclusive characters: Fugitoid and three of Ubisoft's Rabbids.

TMNT: Smash-Up received mixed reviews upon its release, not quite living up to the 25th anniversary hype it had managed to generate ahead of release. But if you like Smash Bros. and you love TMNT, maybe you owe it to yourself to give this one a look. **– DAVID**



RELEASED: Wii, SEPTEMBER 2009 PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: GAME ARTS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: ARCADE ATTACK

I'LL BE HONEST: I forgot this game even existed.

Ubisoft's final effort during the same span of time when they steered the TMNT ship, Arcade Attack was a Nintendo DS-exclusive release that was abysmally bad, rivaling Mutant Melee for worst in the overall series.

There was nothing to it! The gameplay was so bland and basic that it could barely qualify as a video game at all.

Ostensibly, this was supposed to be an arcade-styled beat-'em-up in the tradition of Turtles in Time and the original arcade game. Ubisoft talked a big game about that in pre-release marketing, and gave the game the title of "Arcade Attack" to clearly try to establish that nostalgia-baiting connection. But if the goal of this game was to bring back the feel of those hits, it missed the mark entirely. It's like the developers had no clue about what made those old games great at all.

You literally just walk forward, button-mash to be a bad guy (or two!), then walk forward again, button-mash against another dude, then . . .

And so on. A woeful failure, and one that's worth forgetting. **– LUCAS**

RELEASED: DS, NOVEMBER 2009 PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: UBISOFT

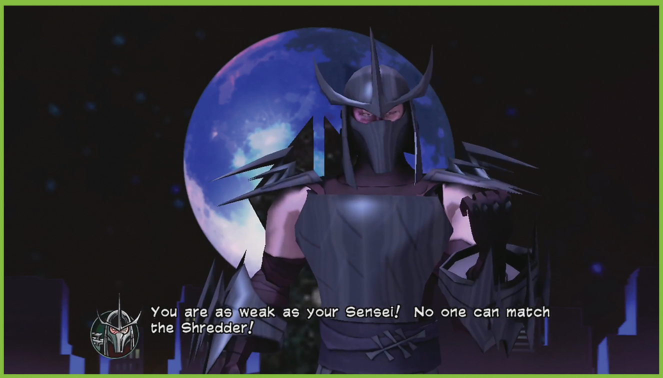
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

HOW ABOUT ANOTHER reboot?

The rights to the Turtles brand were sold to Nickelodeon in 2009, and the #1 Network for Kids got to work crafting their own cartoon starring the characters. They didn't rush. They took their time and got it right, and when the fully computer-generated new animated series hit the airwaves in November 2012, it was well received by those who'd grown up with the '87 show, others who'd entered the fandom thanks to the 2003 crew and total newcomers alike. TMNT 2012 made for some great television.

The same, sadly, could not be said for its first tie-in video game. The game license had passed to Activision, and they handed development over to Magic Pockets, who turned in a truly sub-par effort that in no way lived up to the standard being set by the show.

This game was another basic 3D brawler. There was certainly an opportunity to do that style of game better than before, since the GameCube's trio of Turtles titles made in the same genre truly set the bar low. Still, Magic Pockets managed to ram our heroes' bald green heads straight into it. The action was slow, and poorly programmed – hit detection was off and characters would get hung up on the scenery. Voice acting was in, so that seemed like a plus – but not all of the show's actors participated (Jason Biggs was too big for video games, I guess), and many of the lines that were recorded by original cast members were marred by scratchy audio quality. All four Turtles ran around together even when you played solo, and then they'd stupidly just stand there and watch, for example, Shredder choking their brother. A disappointing effort. **– LUCAS**



RELEASED: Wii & 3DS, OCTOBER 2013 **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION **DEVELOPER:** MAGIC POCKETS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

HOW ABOUT *ANOTHER* reboot?

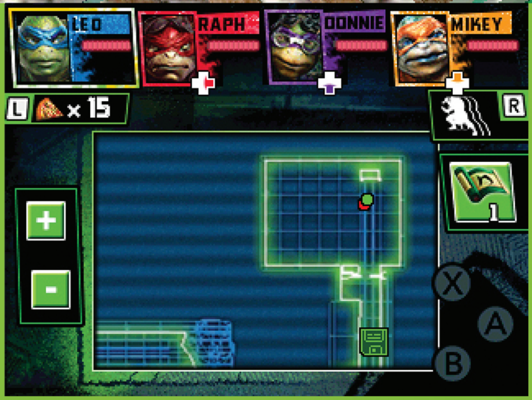
The 2007 computer animated TMNT film didn't succeed as well as its creators had hoped it would, so the next move for the brand, where the silver screen was concerned, was to go back to live action. Well, mostly live action – live-action humans like April appearing alongside new CGI takes on the Turtles. Big, bulky takes on the Turtles. And lots of explosions . . . because Michael Bay was involved, as the producer!

Reception to this 2014 cinematic reboot was mixed-to-bad (though it performed well enough to score a sequel). Meanwhile, the Magic Pockets team got tapped again by Activision to also adapt this version of the TMNT into video game form.

And credit where credit's due here: They did a better job the second time around! 2014's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles for the Nintendo 3DS was a genuinely interesting, arguably even good game. It dared to break new ground by bringing the Turtles into a genre they'd never explored before: the dungeon crawler!

Mindless bashing and brawling was swapped out for a game design that felt more like Diablo or Dungeons & Dragons. Each of the brothers roamed through dungeons – or, rather, sewers – and earned experience after successfully felling foes. Each one had a unique role-playing-aligned strength, like Raph being the team's tank with his huge HP total, and Leo being something of a spellcaster. There was even an inventive weapon crafting system in which the Turtles could upgrade their usual arsenal!

The final product wasn't great, but it was absolutely ambitious, with many of the series' most unique ideas! That's worth applauding. **– LUCAS**



RELEASED: 3DS, JULY 2014 **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION **DEVELOPER:** MAGIC POCKETS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: DANGER OF THE OOZE

A CONSIDERABLE STEP up from the first attempt at adapting the 2012 Nickelodeon incarnation of the TMNT into video game form, the reins for this installment were handed over to none other than WayForward, who crafted a Metroidvania-styled love letter to the then-new series for the Nintendo 3DS.

You can feel the appreciation for the show as soon as you go to enter your name – particularly because Michelangelo pops in to interrupt the process and pick one out for you himself. "It's kinda his thing," as he tells you before labelling you with a random title such as "Pizza Muncher."

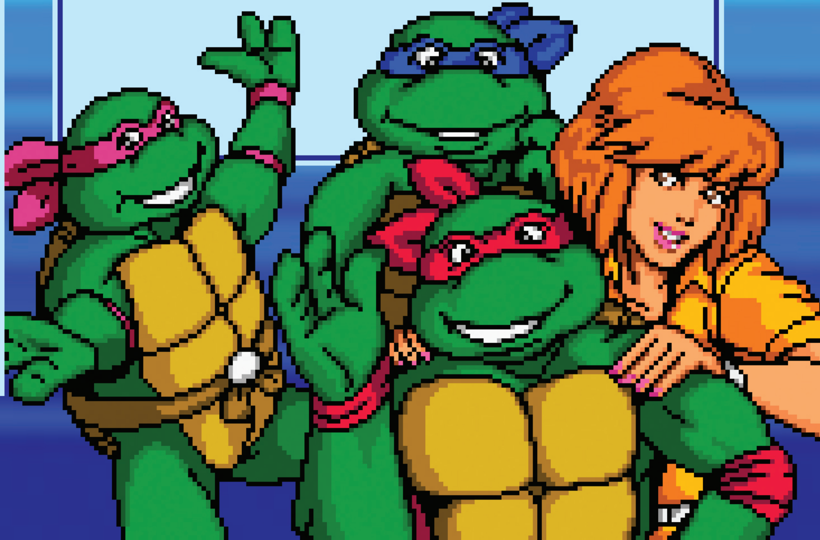
The game takes inspiration from a variety of sources, giving us a quest in which one player switches between all four Turtles as needed (like the original NES game), gives them unique skills (like in Radical Rescue) and incorporates combo-style brawler mechanics as your main method of fighting (like so many other games in the franchise). At the same time, while combining various attributes that have worked in the past, it has also taken lessons in what didn't work – such as making sure all four Turtles are effectively useful in combat.

Visually, it draws from the cartoon it's based on and nails the aesthetic, and even goes so far as to use the same voice cast to drive the story (set between the second and third seasons) forward. Jake Kaufman provided the soundtrack, which is evocative of classic Turtles tunes of days gone by.

Unfortunately, the game was delisted from digital storefronts when Activision didn't renew their TMNT license. As such, if you want to play it now, you'll need to track down a physical copy. Booyakasha! **– DAVID**

RELEASED: 3DS, OCTOBER 2014 PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD

From pure 2D action to 3D brawlers, from cramped, linear enemy gauntlets to wide-open, go-anywhere Metroidvanias, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have cut Shredder no slack in a wide variety of video game styles across a span of over 30 years. As the villain named after a kitchen utensil has not had any success in stopping the team of teens in any more modern kind of game design, he's now set to return the series almost all the way back to its roots to try to take his Revenge in arcade beat-'em-up fashion. And who knows? Maybe Shredder's Revenge will just be the beginning of an all-new chapter for the TMNT!



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE

The original toon Turtles are back!

THEY FIRST FOUGHT the Foot in 1984. In 1987, they became Saturday morning superstars. And by 1989, as we've just seen, their video game career had kicked into gear. Now, after 37 years of sensational sequels, sloppy spin-offs, robust reboots and reviled revivals, these nearly four-decade-old teenagers are getting ready to turn back time and revisit their retro roots.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge is an all-new beat-'em-up built with all-old characters. Ignoring the many more modern versions of these heroes that have been seen on screens and in print since, this game brings back the cast of the original TMNT cartoon.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DOTEMU
DEVELOPER: TRIBUTE GAMES
RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: RP

Well, maybe not ignoring the more modern versions entirely! Take a look at the emotions being expressed by our protagonists on these screens, and those on the pages ahead – I'm sure my memory is more than a little rusty at this point, but the seething rage on display on Raph's face was never a part of his '87 persona. Every other iteration of him to come afterward, sure, but Toon Raph was a jokester first and foremost. Goofball antics are reserved for Michelangelo any more, though – and that's reflected here as well. Just look how silly his big arm-pumping run cycle is compared to his brothers'!

This is the first big modernization in Shredder's Revenge. While this new game builds on the foundation laid down by the Turtles' first arcade game, its sequel Turtles in Time, the home console ports of both those games and the NES-exclusive interquel that was released between the two, the four Turtles did not have a ton of unique personality in any of those adventures. In TMNT II on NES, each brother had a grand total of three attacks: a forward strike with their weapon, a jumping swipe that did a bit more damage and a flying jump kick. All the same for all the heroes. TMNT III introduced unique special moves for the four – giving more of a reason to be choosy on the character select screen – and Turtles in Time did the same. But still the biggest difference was the color of their masks.

ATTACK ANALYSIS

The bros are ninja clones no more! The characters adopting the more distinct personalities of later iterations in how they run and wear their emotions was just the first clue that things are going to be different in Shredder's Revenge. In this game, all four Turtles have completely different movesets! There's not a single shared animation among any of them, as every brother puts his own spin on fighting the Foot.

Let's stick with my favorite, Raph, first. His anger issues compel him to rush right into close quarters with his targets — which is just as well since his sais remain the shortest-reaching of all the main weapons here. That doesn't seem to matter much any more, though, as Raph's been given animations that have him lunging out farther than his brothers to compensate. Sometimes he holds the sais backwards to make them shorter still, deliberately defying his decades-old drawback! (Maybe it's the years of always being everyone's last pick in the video games that has made him so mad.) Flashy sai spins, a Shoryuken-style uppercut and a move that has him spinning through the air with his sais between his legs, like a whirling buzzsaw, round out Raph's attacks.

On the opposite extreme, as always, is stern and serious Leonardo. This is a ninja warrior who knows he'll triumph thanks to his training . . . and maybe thanks to his comically large katana blades. Seriously, look at the size of those things! The spritework here is making sure to emphasize the fact that these swords mean business, and they do give Leo a lot of reach for his slashes. His greatest offense may be defense, though, as early footage suggests that Leo might have access to a counterattack move that his brothers don't share. Either that, or the timing of his meter-draining super move was executed with exacting precision, as we saw him shrug off an incoming ax attack and respond with a tornadic torrent of sword slashes that left him as the last one standing!

Mikey, ever the comedian, flings himself headfirst into each fight. And that's literal! He has both a horizontal flying headbutt that would make E. Honda jealous and a corkscrewing, headbutting spin jump to assail any enemies in the air. Meanwhile, his super move appears to be pulled straight out of the opening sequence of the 1987 toon, as he spins his nunchucks left, right, up and down while standing in place, grinning cheesily.

Last but not least — longest, in fact — is Donatello, still speaking softly but carrying a big stick. His bo staff lets him take entire teams of Foot Soldiers out to the ball game, smashing them with spinning strikes of such force that he'd score at least a dozen home runs for sure. Donnie's bo has made him the go-to Turtle to pick in video games ever since its dominant performance in the first NES game 32 years ago, and it still makes him an appealing selection in Shredder's Revenge. But Donnie doesn't let his weapon do all the talking, as he mixes up his moves with at least a couple different flying kicks. Because sometimes the best way to face the Foot is giving them a foot to the face!

HEAD'S UP!

That was a lengthy breakdown of each teen's battle style, but that's a beat-'em-up for you — if each heroes' core set of moves isn't fun, the whole game is going to fall flat. I mentioned super moves a bit. That might not end up being their name, but we know from keeping an eye on the HUD at the top of the screen while watching early footage that the Turtles seem to fill a meter by landing strikes on their opponents — "Ninja Power," perhaps — and then that stored-up resource can be cashed in to activate the flashiest, most damage-dealing moves in each ninja's arsenal.

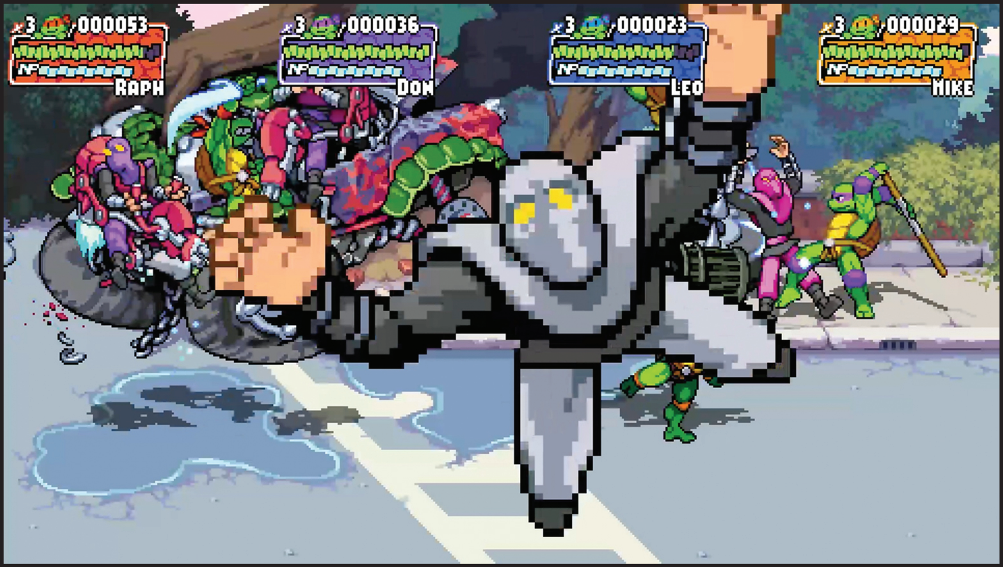
There also may be an incentive built into keeping an active combo streak alive for as many consecutive hits as possible. Though that's only become apparent in the newest video we've seen, after a HUD revision gave extra emphasis to keeping track of the growing number of hits in sequence. You can see the before-and-after here — most of these screens come from Tribute Games' official press kit, and were pulled from the game's debut trailer, when the HUD still looked kind of jagged. The upper left shot on this page has the newer, cleaner look, though. I much prefer it! (Why did the old version's enemy kill counter go up to 999,999? That's a lot of fallen Foot!)

CHARACTER COUNT

So we've got Leo, Donnie, Mikey and Raph all accounted for, and all using the most distinct sets of moves they've ever had before. Is that all? Fans were quick to ask that question immediately after Shredder's Revenge was first revealed, as the cartoon sequence that preceded the gameplay footage in its debut trailer specifically showed two more characters kicking butt: April and Splinter. Could they also be playable? Unlockable in some way?

It might be best not to get those kinds of hopes up. Officially the word from the developers is that the Turtles are the only playable heroes here. But we should acknowledge that Dotemu is the publisher on this game – the same publisher that just published the Mr. X Nightmare DLC for Streets of Rage 4, reviewed earlier in this issue. So perhaps playable April, Splinter or other "heroes" like Vernon Fenwick will get the call to action as part of a DLC package that ships post-release.

Why call out Vernon, of all people? Well, that cowardly rival of April's at Channel 6 is the only other "good guy" we've seen in gameplay so far! I don't actually think he'll be playable, DLC or otherwise. But his appearance is a fun cameo, as he's seen quaking in his boots trying to appease big boss Bebop, who's taken over the TV station and made himself the star of all its shows! Shredder's Revenge is sure to be jam-packed with similar moments and appearances from other familiar faces from the '87 show. The hotrodding teenagers from Dimension X? The Punk Frog clan? Ace Duck?! Anyone and everyone might show up to bring an extra smile to nostalgic fans.



FANS AT THE HELM

That attention to detail is in play for this product because it's being produced by, well, nostalgic fans! Back in our Turtles Through Time feature a few pages ago, we gave individual attention to the GBA TMNT title that was released in 2007. Its developer was Ubisoft, officially. But the key members of that Ubisoft dev team left the company just a few years after that game's release to form their own studio: Tribute Games! So the same talent that already made that one great TMNT brawler before – and the incredible Scott Pilgrim vs. The World while they were at Ubisoft as well – are the ones who are steering this ship. They've got the right bona fides to be trusted with the Turtles!

What's more, the publisher on this project, Dotemu, I just mentioned were in charge of Streets of Rage 4. So we're getting a depth of understanding about what makes brawlers great in the modern era coming from both directions! A better dream team would be nearly impossible to assemble.

TEE'S TEASE OF THE OST

So how about one more dream team member? If Tribute's got the visuals and gameplay on lock and Dotemu knows how to sell the whole package, the one last piece of the puzzle that's needed is a true Turtle-ish soundtrack. The energetic, get-your-blood-pumpin' anthems that played in the background while you bashed the Foot in the old arcade games were a major part of their appeal. I brought up briefly a few pages ago that the arcade game was unlockable in Battle Nexus on the GameCube. I didn't bother to bring up that Turtles in Time could be similarly accessed in Mutant Nightmare. Why? Because the original audio was ripped out of both for some reason, and playing those same games with different music just deflated the whole experience. They were un-fun.

All that to say: Nothing to worry about here! We're getting Tee Lopes!

The same incredible composer who brought the vibe of early '90s Sonic back to life and gave it an extra shot of adrenaline for Sonic Mania – and who also just scored Mr. X Nightmare for Streets of Rage 4 – is in charge of the newest Turtles tunes. We've only heard snippets so far, but we're already convinced that the audio side of this retro revival will absolutely live up to – and likely even surpass – all expectations. Get ready to make room in your brain for more memorable melodies!

COMING SOON!

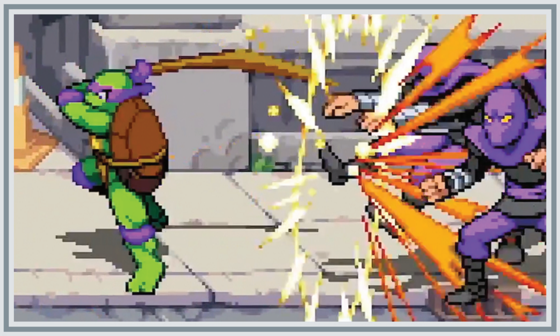
All in all, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge looks like it's shaping up to be, quite possibly, the greatest TMNT title ever made. And we should be able to judge for ourselves soon! The game, currently, is still planned for release before the end of 2021. Get your pizza ready! **– LUCAS**

HE LEADS
LEONARDO

If you're new to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (or at least, this 1987 toon version of them), here's a page to help you make your first character selection! Leonardo is the leader of this team of four brothers. He's the one who takes his ninja training most seriously (which sometimes gets him made fun of by the others), and he wields two katana blades at the same time in order to slice and dice every Foot Clan fiend he can find!

HE DOES MACHINES
DONATELLO

Donatello is the techie of the team. That's always been more apparent in the cartoons than the video games, as it's difficult to represent his high degree of intelligence in the middle of a battlefield – just know that any vehicles the brothers use were built by him! Also odd is that, for all the attention he gives to technology, his weapon is the simplest of all. Just a big wooden bo staff! Maybe wielding it is his way to get back to nature?



HE'S COOL . . . BUT RUDE
RAPHAEL

Raphael has two different moods: mad, and about to get mad. He's got the shortest fuse out of all of these brothers, and struggles to cope with anger management so much that some incarnations of the character have nearly crossed over into villainy! No worries for that happening here, though, as in Shredder's Revenge he's content to take all of his aggression and channel it fully into brutal beatdowns of real bad guys.

HE'S A PARTY DUDE
MICHELANGELO

Rounding out the team is the most teenaged of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, as Michelangelo is all about smiling, having fun and totally enjoying his youthful years, even in the middle of bashing Foot Soldier robots into broken bits. Don't mistake his easygoing attitude for a lack of dedication to being a true ninja, though, as his mastery of the whirling nunchucks proves he's got the skills to pay the bills! (Pizza delivery bills.)

SONIC COLORS: ULTIMATE

The best Sonic experience of the Wii era is back for an encore.

DURING THE FIRST "Sonic Central" presentation on May 27 this year, Sega and Sonic Team announced that a new release would be made available to celebrate the Blue Blur's 30th anniversary: Sonic Colors: Ultimate, an enhanced remaster of the title that originally came out exclusively for the Wii (alongside a Sonic Rush-esque Nintendo DS version) all the way back in 2010.

In interviews, Sega and Sonic Team head Takashi Iizuka explained that Sonic has seen an increase in younger fans following the releases of games such as Sonic Mania, Sonic Forces and Team Sonic Racing – oh, and a hit movie that came out last year!

Between being aimed at a younger audience already and never being re-released before, Sonic Colors was picked with the intent of creating the definitive version of the game, even going so far as to add new features that weren't in the original and additional touches to aid younger and less-experienced players along.

For instance, as first reported in Famitsu, 1-Ups – and lives – are now a thing of the past. According to Shacknews, new Tails Save tokens will call upon an aerial rescue from Sonic's two-tailed mutant squirrel sidekick whenever he falls into a pit, bringing him back to his "last known location" instead of the last checkpoint or the beginning of the act. Meanwhile, the 1-Up items themselves are replaced by new 100 Count Rings that grant Sonic a temporary burst of invincibility (and a boost to your score!).

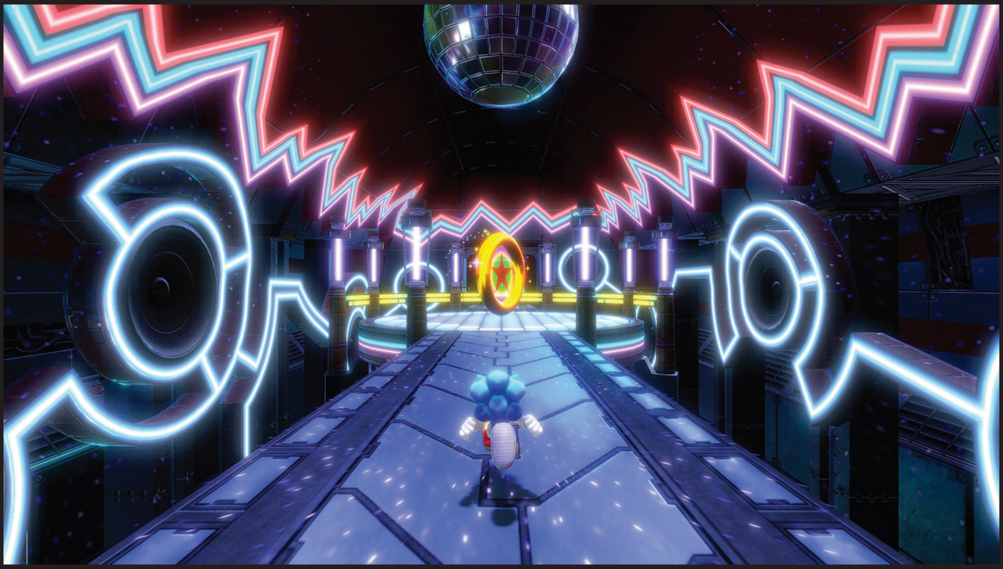
Another new feature is the inclusion of the Jade Wisp, who debuted in Team Sonic Racing. Utilizing its power will allow Sonic to travel through solid objects to discover hidden paths and obtain otherwise unreachable items.

The new Rival Rush mode will test your mettle as you take on Metal – Metal Sonic, that is. Beat the mechanical doppelgänger, and you'll receive a reward. Though what you'll get seems to be a secret Sega is currently keeping close to their chest! You can also nab Park Tokens throughout the levels. Spending these in the Options Satellite will allow you to customize everything from Sonic's gloves and shoes to his Boost effect and aura, though all changes are only cosmetic.

Of course, what's a remastered release without some visual and audio enhancements? After all, the original Sonic Colors debuted on the Wii – Nintendo's last standard-definition home console before stepping into the world of high definition with the Wii U. While all versions are boasting revamped lighting and improved graphics, the Switch will of course not feature 4K visuals. In addition, it appears that it will run at only 30 frames per second versus competing platforms' 60 fps. In terms of soundtrack, everything has been remixed, including the main theme.

To further promote the title, Sega is also releasing a two-episode animated tie-in titled Sonic Colors: Rise of the Wisps, in which Sonic and Tails team up with a Jade Wisp to rescue its captured friends on Sweet Mountain. In addition to a new animation style, Rise of the Wisps stands apart from Sega's previous Sonic promotional animations by being fully voiced, including the return of seasoned veteran Sonic voice actor Roger Craig Smith!

Sonic Colors: Ultimate will be available physically, but the Digital Deluxe Edition will feature early access, three exclusive remixes, special clothes for your custom Sonic and movie-themed Player Icons. **– DAVID**



SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 7, 2021 RATING: E

CRUIS'N BLAST

Cruisin' out of the arcade and into your living room.

FEW RACERS EVER enticed me when I went to arcades more than the Cruis'n games, and that was back when it was still published by Midway! Plus, it was one of the only racers to sport a school bus in the roster. It was outlandish racing with wild tracks and crazy driving. I'm glad to see the series live on in arcades, but now the latest outing is coming home to Switch!

The publisher of the arcade game, Raw Thrills, licensed the name Cruis'n after Nintendo bought it, and they developed Cruis'n Blast for arcades in 2017. All aspects of the arcade game will be in the home version, plus loads more. More tracks, cars and secrets will all be unlockable.

You can race in the original five arcade tracks, but the Switch version will add 24 more! Cruis'n has often used real-world locations with added flourish, but this title eschews that for more theme park-inspired outings. There's jungles, deserts, mountains and cities, but things get really wild when you race in tsunamis, typhoons and tornadoes. Topping themselves further, you'll experience dinosaurs, alien spaceship invasions and even a yeti as you race on some tracks!

New tours have been mentioned too, but not much else is known about that. I imagine those will be linked to the myriad unlockables in the game that mostly center around tracks and cars, but also upgrades. Tracks will contain secret keys to nab and cash to grab, but no details yet exist on what those collectables will be used for specifically.

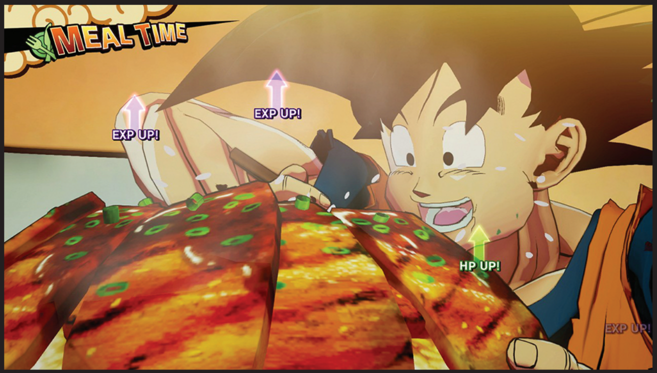
Graphically, things are as busy as ever. Tracks are packed full with fun details to zoom by, shortcuts to discover and other distractions. It could just be that the footage we've seen so far was unfinished, but the the game looks more polygonal and even somewhat primitive in some of its models and textures. This may just be the sacrifice made for bringing an arcade game to the Switch, but Cruis'n games have always been more about the gameplay than the visuals.

You'll be happy to know the school bus is back, but the more outlandish fire truck, tank, winged unicorn, triceratops and *a shark with a freaking laser on its head* will definitely make your eyes go wide even more than before. There's even a spaceship among the 23 vehicles the game boasts! The implications of having dinosaurs, mythical beasts and starships racing each other in the same world are head-spinning. How will it all work?

Up to four friends can play split-screen couch co-op like the old days, or connect with three other Switches for local play. I remember playing split-screen with four people on old CRT screens, but even with the added benefit of widescreen TVs, it seems like a daunting task to keep up with everything going on in this insane racer with only a quarter of a screen! While it's slightly disappointing that there is – as of yet – no online announcement, Cruis'n always felt like a more intimate experience to be played with others in close proximity, especially due to its arcade roots and arcade-style gameplay. It's also better to laugh about all the zaniness when friends are actually present!

The announcement of Cruis'n Blast for Switch has me recalling the fun I had with the minimal racing skill I possessed when playing the first Cruis'n, and this new iteration looks like it should be fun for everyone regardless of any potential dings against it. It truly looks like a blast! **– BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: RAW THRILLS RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 14, 2021 RATING: E10+



DRAGON BALL Z: KAKAROT

+ A NEW POWER AWAKENS SET

Go, go, Goku!

DRAGON BALL Z was the show that kickstarted my love for Japanese media, and it's no doubt served as an entry point for many others.

The long-running Dragon Ball franchise from Akira Toriyama has spanned manga, anime, movies and video games for decades and is one of the most popular series of its kind.

The story of strong and fun-loving protagonist Goku and the colorful cast that fights by his side has stood the test of time, and soon, fans can relive it on Nintendo Switch when Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot + A New Power Awakens Set arrives on September 24. The Switch version of the single-player action RPG was announced during Nintendo's E3 Direct in June. The game initially released for PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC in January 2020.

The Standard Edition for Switch includes the base game and its first two DLC packs for $59.99, which isn't a bad deal considering the DLC had to be purchased separately on PC and other consoles. This edition doesn't include the game's third and latest DLC, Trunks: The Warrior of Hope, that released in June on other platforms.

If you want a bundle with all the DLC, you can get the Deluxe or Ultimate Editions of the game. They were shown briefly at the end of Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot's Switch trailer and feature the base game, all three DLC packs and other digital goodies, but there's no preorder or pricing information for them at the time of this publication.

Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot features the journey of Goku and the Z Fighters through four main storylines in the series – the Saiyan, Namek, Android and Buu Sagas – as they defend Earth from a host of different threats.

You'll get to play as Goku and take on the roles of other noteworthy characters like Vegeta, Gohan, Trunks, Piccolo, Vegito and Gotenks. Boss battles will feature the series' most popular villains: the Ginyu Force, Frieza, Cell, Majin Buu and more.

The game features an action combat system where you use regular attacks, combos and Super Attacks like Goku's signature Kamehameha Wave. You can also guard, dodge enemy attacks by zipping through the air and use items to replenish your health. As you level up from fighting, you can upgrade Super Attacks and passive moves called Know-hows via skill trees.

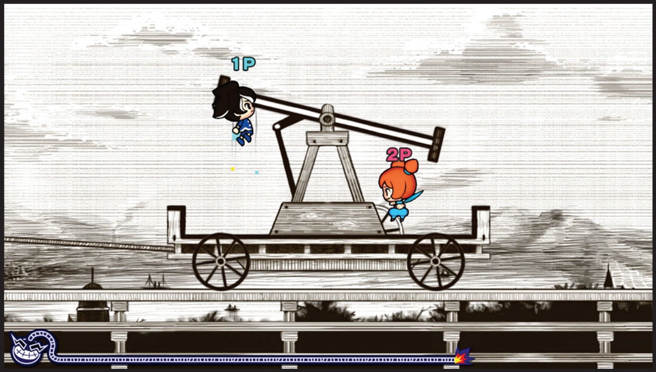
Two support characters can join you in battle from the large cast of characters, including Krillin, Yamcha, Tien Shinhan, Chiaotzu, Android 18, Goten and Kid Trunks. They will attack on their own and heal you, and you can command them to use their own Super Attacks.

The game also provides more lighthearted activities, including fishing, eating, completing sidequests and traversing the world by flying or taking the wheel of a hovercar.

The DLC has offerings beyond the main story, delving into storylines from Dragon Ball Super and allowing players to use Goku and Vegeta in their Super Saiyan God and Super Saiyan Blue transformations.

Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot seems like it'll give fans a fun dose of nostalgia and more agency in this iconic story. I know I can't be the only one who thinks giving Frieza and Cell another good beatdown would be extremely satisfying! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: CYBERCONNECT2
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 24, 2021 RATING: T



WARIOWARE: GET IT TOGETHER!

Everyone is here . . . and they're teaming up to tackle microgames in pairs!

THE WHOLE GANG'S getting back together.

Despite Wario being arguably the most unappealing Nintendo character to spend any time with, he's managed nonetheless to amass a sizeable crew of close friends over the years through the various games in the WarioWare series. How are they able to endure his odorous presence? Do all of them simply lack a sense of smell?

The mysteries of how and why this squad keeps hanging around such a foul fellow may never be solved. But we can at least review the roster of WarioWare stars, since all are set to be playable in this new Switch sequel!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 RATING: E10+

First up, the starting lineup first introduced in the series' debut title, WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Microgame$, released for the Game Boy Advance in 2003. Wario himself led the charge, but created a secondary persona with his new biker outfit that set him apart from his original Mario knock-off look. Still the same as always, though, was his sense of greed, and he came up with a scheme to make tons of cash by selling shoddy video games! He just needed to hire a bunch of schmucks to develop them all.

Enter Jimmy T. A disco dancer with a blue afro and an ever-present set of shades, he brought rhythm and style to the team. And killer dance moves!

Then there were Dribble and Spitz, an orange bulldog and yellow cat who worked as mechanics in Diamond City. Years before Uber and Lyft, their taxi was the best way to get around town!

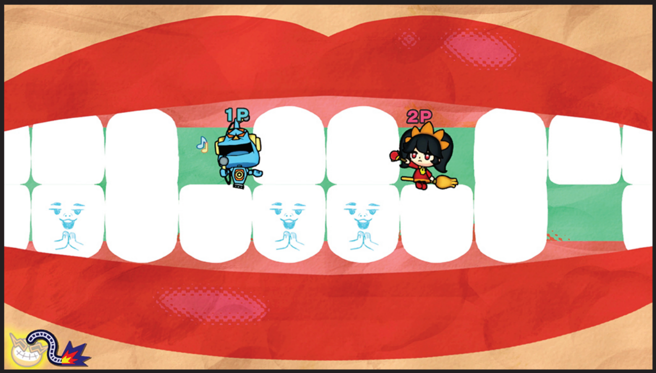
Mona had no need for their wheels, though, as she was a food delivery girl with her own scooter. Maybe she'd be a DoorDasher these days?

9-Volt was the character who resonated most with many players, I'm sure, as he's a grade school kid who's totally obsessed with retro Nintendo!

Orbulon the alien, Dr. Crygor the mad scientist and twin ninja sisters Kat and Ana rounded out the OG crew. All of these characters served as hosts of sorts, each presenting different sets of microgame challenges that all matched up with their personalities in some way. And that same structure was carried forward through most of the sequels that followed in the series — with more fresh faces every time!

WarioWare quickly became a game series defined by unique gameplay gimmicks, often used as a way to showcase new hardware features on fresh Nintendo systems. For instance, 2005's WarioWare: Touched! included a set of microgames that were played using the Nintendo DS microphone — so Wario got a new pal named Mike, a microphone-equipped karaoke robot, who hosted those challenges. Also appearing for the first time in that same sequel were little witch girl Ashley and her tiny devil pal, Red. Probably the most popular of this whole set of characters — there was a big push to make Ashley playable in Smash! (She became an Assist Trophy.)

When the series turned its attention to highlighting the motion control capability of the Wii Remote in 2007's WarioWare: Smooth Moves, another pair of characters appeared who were masters of body movement: martial arts expert Master Mantis and his student, Young Cricket! Other games expanded existing team members' families: 9-Volt got an older brother named 18-Volt and a Mom, 5-Volt. Dr. Crygor was revealed to be a grandpa, as Penny Crygor swept into the series. Then WarioWare Gold, three years ago, kept the growth going, debuting Lulu!



Even more supporting cast members exist beyond that large list, which, again, is baffling. (Did Ashley cast a spell to remove Wario's smell?) But it looks like that set of stars will be the ones getting called upon to each do something new in WarioWare: Get It Together! – and that's becoming fully playable characters! All these friendly faces who've previously just been window dressing to the microgame experience are leaping directly into the action on Nintendo Switch.

And every one of them plays differently! In an intentionally unbalanced (but hopefully still fair) design decision, the developers of Get It Together! are keeping each friend's unique personality intact as they become controllable characters.

Examples! Wario uses his signature shoulder bash to attack targets directly – but 9-Volt keeps his distance by striking with a yo-yo instead. Mona tosses a boomerang around while constantly riding her scooter – but Dr. Crygor weirdly swims around to headbutt things.

Everyone is different, and who you choose will influence how you have to approach each situation that's presented. But no playing it safe! The game makes you pick three characters at a time before the microgames begin, so you're never allowed to fully settle down into just mastering a single moveset.

Where things really get wild? Two-player co-op! When a real-world pal joins you to play Get It Together! together, you'll both pick three characters apiece!

Some of the characters are built with co-op in mind in particular, too – Dribble and Spitz both fly into the fray on hovering versions of their old taxi, but Dribble's blaster can only fire to the right, while Spitz can only shoot to the left. It's going to take true tag-team teamwork to clear each task, like rocking a fussy baby back to sleep!

The WarioWare games have always been a good time, but most have been solo experiences. I'm excited that Get It Together! is made to make fun new multiplayer memories with family and friends. It's only appropriate, since it's also serving as a celebration of 18 years of Wario himself having friends! (Somehow.) **– LUCAS**

NICKELODEON ALL-STAR BRAWL

The Ninja Turtles face off against an army of animated icons!

AS WE'VE SEEN on prior pages, the Turtles are fighting genre veterans – and now at least two of the world-famous ninja brothers are set to enter the new fray of Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl! This latest Smash-like features a massive crossover of characters from various Nicktoons, though I doubt many of you bargained on seeing Powdered Toast Man punch Danny Phantom in the face at any point during the year 2021.

This is a truly cross-generational affair, designed to bring kids and parents together, featuring fighters from the '90s like Ren and Stimpy and Oblina from Aaahh!!! Real Monsters going toe-to-toe with more recent favorites like SpongeBob Squarepants and Lucy Loud from The Loud House.

Even the edgy, borderline horrific Invader Zim made the cut, which means anything goes. Could Kenan from Good Burger serve up a knuckle sandwich? Aang from Avatar? Catdog from . . . Catdog? As Smash Ultimate's DLC is winding down and the opportunity to speculate about who its next fighters will be is coming to an end, it's beautiful to see Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl step in to try to fill those shoes. A close friend of mine was once convinced that Nigel Thornberry was coming to Ultimate. Now, he's got his wish! (Well not really, but don't tell him that. Let him dream a bit longer.)

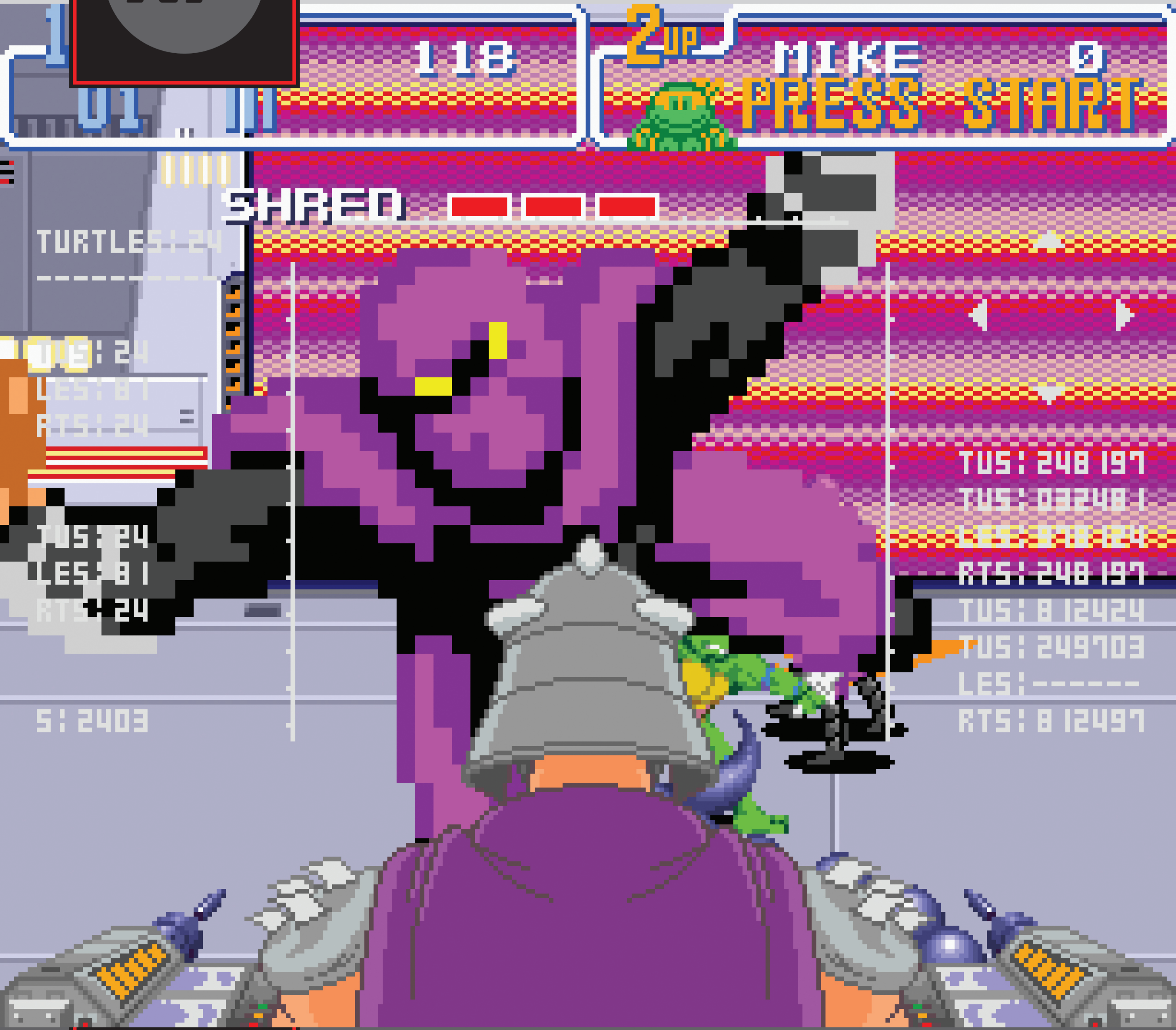
SWITCH PUBLISHER: GAMEMILL ENT. DEVELOPERS: FAIR PLAY LABS & LUDOSITY RELEASE: FALL 2021 RATING: RP

All-Star Brawl is also poised to gain the respect of the competitive fighting game community. It's being developed by Ludosity, the creators of Slap City, an indie crossover Smash-like that's beloved by many hardcore fighting game fans. Part of that love comes from a dedicated "Clutch Button," Slap City's primary addition to the Smash formula. It allows for even more precise character control: stuff like moonwalking, short hopping and wall-jumping. There's a good chance Ludosity will bring those mechanics over to All-Star Brawl, assuring it will have more depth than DreamMix TV World Fighters, Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble and most of the other Smash clones we've seen over the years. Throw in some rollback netcode (the preferred netcode for competitive players) and you have yourself a dynamite combination.

If that all sounds like gobbledy-gook, don't worry too much. Chances are All-Star Brawl will appeal to folks who play for fun and for glory. In fact, the only truly worrisome thing about this announcement is the fact that it didn't happen sooner!

And maybe the serious tonal whiplash of it all. Seeing Helga from Hey Arnold! get the snot beat out of her by Reptar from Rugrats is certainly odd, but as long as the game is fun, it will all become a part of our new normal.

As for the Turtles content, both Leo and Mikey are confirmed playable so far, and two TMNT stages have been showcased as well: an NYC rooftop and the Technodrome! And there may be even more Turtles representation than that – rumor has it that Shredder will slice into the cast too! **– JONATHAN**



FLINGING FOOT SOLDIERS INTO THE FOREGROUND

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME
SNES, 1992

By far the most mind-blowing moment in the early years of Turtles gaming happened in the first boss battle against Shredder in Turtles in Time. This 16-bit sequel surprised players from the start with the unique, exciting and visually hilarious ability to defeat Foot Soldiers by picking them up and tossing them “into” the screen, such that they looked like the were faceplanting against the other side of your TV screen glass before being removed from combat. But then the game brilliantly gameified that gag by having Shredder appear in the foreground of your first fight against him, riding in the cockpit of a mech that attacked the Turtles with grabbing pinchers and laser blasts. The only way to deal damage in retaliation was to grab hold of one of the endlessly respawning Foot Soldiers within reach, then turn and toss them straight at Shredder’s face! With a bit of Mode 7 magic, lasting memories were made. — **LUCAS**

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

AT LONG LAST, the wait was over: The Nintendo 64 was here! And to mark the occasion, the 88th issue of Nintendo Power presented a swinging fold-out cover depicting Mario taking his enormous eternal nemesis, Bowser, for a grand old swing in one of the battlegrounds from Super Mario 64. Sure, all the hype about the Terminator 2 and Jurassic Park computers heralding a new era in gaming ultimately didn't end up leading to graphics like this (yet), but it was a grand visual to mark Nintendo's first steps into the next generation (and the 10 pages of coverage that were granted to it).

Before they got to that, however, the first thing to appear to Power Players between it and the Player's Pulse section was dedicated to the actual launch of the new platform (see sidebar). Beyond Super Mario 64, readers got to see not one, but *two* 64-bit trips across the U.S. of A. with eight pages dedicated to the criminally neglected (more so in recent years) Pilotwings 64 and four pages given to the arcade hit Cruis'n USA.

While it had been three years since Jurassic Park (and to a lesser extent, the Super Mario Bros. movie) made dinosaurs pop culture cool, they were still a pretty hot subject, hence Acclaim's Turok: Dinosaur Hunter for the N64. Four pages of behind-the-scenes coverage prepped us for the first first-person shooter to come to the platform. Those wanting to feel the thrill of the Hunt even sooner would find a fold-out poster on the opposite side of some Kirby Super Star maps and coverage.

That's right, just because the Nintendo 64 was the new hotness didn't mean that the Super NES lost its cool overnight! Five pages were dedicated to the fan-favorite Kirby title, plus the three making up the back of the poster.

Realm, a Super NES game with an average reception, was also covered within these pages. What makes this stand out is that this title comes from Titus, who would go down in history for making one of – if not *the* – worst Nintendo 64 games of all time in Superman 64. In that way, it's fitting – maybe even ironic – that they should have a game featured in the issue of Nintendo Power that celebrated the launch of the platform they would come to be so strongly associated with.

While Mario was taking up most of the spotlight, one question lingered: Where is Donkey Kong? Along with his little buddy Diddy, that question formed the premise for the third Donkey Kong Country game, Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!, which got a two-page preview in this issue. Also previewed was another Titus game, their Super NES port of Prince of Persia 2, and a most curious experiment from Disney Interactive: Maui Mallard, a game starring Donald Duck portraying a detective named Maui Mallard who moonlights as a ninja named "Cold Shadow." A true identity crisis!

Epic Center expanded its scope to simulations and tactics, giving a look back at a well-performing Super NES title from the system's earliest days, SimCity, plus the turn-based strategy game War 3010: The Revolution. Those who felt a bit more comfortable slaying monsters with a sword firmly in hand (and maybe a dog by their side) were also treated to some Secret of Evermore strategy.

You don't think Nintendo had forgotten about the Game Boy by this point, do you? Not only were there eight pages of 8-bit Diddy Kong goodness for Donkey Kong Land 2, but four pages of Disney's Pinocchio from THQ and the introduction of three Player's Choice titles for Game Boy. The newest members of Nintendo's million-selling second-run club included The Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle 2, Star Wars and Mega Man in Dr. Wily's Revenge – go figure. At least better ones would be added later.

Looking even further into the future, Pak Watch presented glimpses of Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire – the video game branch of a LucasFilm experiment that asked the question "What if we released all the multimedia stuff we would for a movie, but without making the movie?" Other N64 peeks included screens of Tetrisphere, "Super Mario Kart R", Star Fox 64, Wave Race 64 and the ill-fated N64 version of Kirby's Air Ride.

Closing things out with the Player's Poll, the NP crew asked Power Players to think small, as 100 grand prize winners would receive their very own Game Boy Pocket! **– DAVID**

ISSUE #88: **SEPTEMBER 1996**

BLAST OFF TO THE FUTURE

Nintendo makes history with North American Launch of the N64.

The N is near!

On September 29th, the most anticipated system in video-game history goes on sale in stores all over the United States and Canada. Mark your calendar and hustle on down to your local Nintendo dealer. If the N64's appearance in North America is anything like its Japanese debut, you can expect one of the wildest days in retailing history. In Japan, eager gamers lined up the night before the N64 went on sale. Two shipments, totaling a half-million systems, sold out in a week. Many of those systems went to game players who placed their orders and plunked down 25,000 yen (about $250) long before the N64 hit the shelves. It's not surprising that Nintendo officials are advising retailers to prepare for an onslaught of game players eager to get their hands on the future of fun.

Can't wait 'til September 29th to take the N64 for a spin? U.S. residents might want to head over to their local Toys 'R' Us. Beginning the first week of September, every stateside Toys 'R' Us will have a special N64 section featuring at least three systems that you can test out. No Toys 'R' Us nearby? Don't despair. Throughout September, other Nintendo retailers will be setting up displays as fast as they can get them. Every Target and most Wal-Mart stores are slated to get playable N64 displays. At least 3,000 Blockbuster Video stores nationwide will be getting display systems that you can try out. By mid-October, more than 10,000 playable N64 displays will be up and running in the United States.

Still can't find a store with an N64 you can try out? Many more will be running N64 demos. Across the United States, about 1,800 stores will have N64 games on their Power Previews displays. At the push of a button, you'll be able to preview Super Mario 64, Pilotwings 64 and other hot new titles.

If a brief tryout in a store leaves you thirsting for more, you can rent a system at your local Blockbuster Video store. From the launch date until November 30th, Blockbuster Video will be the only official rental dealer in the U.S. For $16.99, you'll get everything you need for instant fun, including the N64 control deck, all the necessary cables and cords, two controllers, instructions and your choice of a Game Pak.

Canadian game players can also look forward to a big piece of the N64 action. In fact, they've already been enjoying the game this summer at special Nintendo

Let the Games Begin

Nintendo's philosophy is simple: deliver the best games, period. That's why Nintendo and the Dream Team of third-party developers are busy putting the finishing touches on an all-star lineup of games slated to ship soon after the initial N64 launch.

Blast Corps	Nintendo
Cruis'n USA	Nintendo
Killer Instinct Gold	Nintendo
Mortal Kombat Trilogy	Williams
NBA Hang Time	Williams
Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire	Nintendo
Tetrisphere	Nintendo
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter	Acclaim
Wave Race 64	Nintendo
Wayne Gretzky's 3-D Hockey	Williams

This great-looking box contains a world of fun. Nintendo plans to ship at least 1 million to U.S. and Canadian stores by March 30th, 1997.

Team Nintendo ace Alan Belardinelli demos Super Mario 64 at the Nintendo Power Pod in Toronto.

To really appreciate the N64, you've gotta play it. Fortunately, that won't be too hard. By launch date, high-tech displays like this one will be installed in stores from coast to coast. Head on down to your local Nintendo retailer to get your fingers on the future of fun!

10 NINTENDO POWER

VOLUME 88 11

NORTH AMERICA GETS THE NINTENDO 64

Before getting to the games in this issue, Nintendo Power marked the release of the Nintendo 64 with a look at Nintendo's marketing plans for the machine leading up to its September 29 launch. Plans were to ship 1,000,000 units to stores across the United States and Canada by the end of March 1997 (i.e. the end of the fiscal year). With the Japanese launch months prior, half a million systems sold out within a week, many of those thanks to pre-orders. As the U.S. launch drew closer, fans wouldn't necessarily have to wait until September 29 to Get N (or Get Out), as the first week of September saw an amazing *three* demo kiosks (as seen above) stationed in every Toys R Us across the country. Other retailers, from Target to Walmart to Blockbuster Video, were also in line to receive kiosks, with the goal of 10,000 displays nationwide by the middle of October. A deal with Blockbuster also made them the official exclusive place to rent a Nintendo 64 and your choice of game for $16.99 until November 30! Canada wouldn't be left out, with demos taking place over the summer at various theme parks and pavilions, and plans for a further 600 kiosks at stores across the country, with a similar rental plan happening at Rogers Video/Videotron. In addition to a rundown of the specs, Nintendo also promised a number of games from them and Dream Team partners Acclaim and Williams would ship soon after launch. The delays were difficult to endure, but the N64 arrived at last!

ORIGINAL RELEASE:
FAMICOM, JULY 7, 1987
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI

PLAYING IT TODAY

For over 34 years, this 8-bit adventure has never officially left Japan, so your best bet at playing it legitimately at the moment is likely seeking out and importing a copy of its Famicom cartridge (if you have the means to play one of those). Its most recent digital re-release just happened in 2015 on Wii U in Japan, so hardware that can access that eShop could also be an option. But with the new GetsuFumaDen: Undying Moon being set to release in the West soon, perhaps patience is the best play here? It may be that this original will finally get released in English as part of the promotion of that title. It wouldn't be the first long-overdue localization to appear in this generation!

EXTRA FUMA

Though his original quest against evil never made it out of Japan, Fuma himself has managed to make the trip a time or two by cameoing his way into other titles made by Konami. The 2010 multiplayer Castlevania game, Harmony of Despair, is the most prominent place – there, Western players could raise a quizzical eyebrow and wonder who this odd sword wielder was in the midst of all the whip-cracking Belmonts. He also lent his likeness to a Monster card in the Yu-Gi-Oh! trading card game, first seen in 2005's Invasion of Chaos expansion set. And finally, you probably already own a small piece of content from GetsuFumaDen and didn't even know it! One of the songs included in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate that's in the rotation to play on the Dracula's Castle stage is "Go! Getsu Fuma!", again linking this game's legacy with that of Castlevania. Both Simon and Richter are no doubt proud to fight for Fuma!

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION GETSUFUMADEN

Remembering the long-lost brother of TMNT on NES.

BY THE TIME Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles made its debut on the NES in 1989, its combination of top-down map exploration and sidescrolling action wasn't unheard of – Zelda II: The Adventure of Link beat it to market by several months, for instance. But as would be discovered years later, it wasn't Nintendo's sequel (which originally released in Japan in 1987) that likely inspired this aspect of the Turtles' video game debut, but another game from Konami's then-recent past.

GetsuFumaDen was released in 1987 for the Nintendo Famicom, exclusively in Japan – and that's where it would stay until the advent of Konami's i-Revo Internet portal initiative in 2006, and perhaps more notably, each iteration of Nintendo's Virtual Console service, starting with the Wii in 2009.

Fuma, the youngest and lone survivor of the three Getsu brothers, similarly wanders around an overworld map, albeit one much more linear than the Turtles' almost Zelda-like free-roaming. Along his path, rather than sewers and New York skyscrapers, he will find numerous torii – Japanese gates used to mark sacred spaces. However, it's by passing through these gates that Fuma is taken to a sidescrolling area, as he fends off numerous foes in order to continue along his journey, the other side of the area marked by a similar torii.

As an interesting aside, an issue of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Adventures from 1992 saw the Turtles on an adventure in Japan, where Raphael nearly succumbed to the allure of one torii that led to Yomi, the underworld. And while later games borrowed from the book, we sadly never got to see Raphael fight his way through the land of the dead.

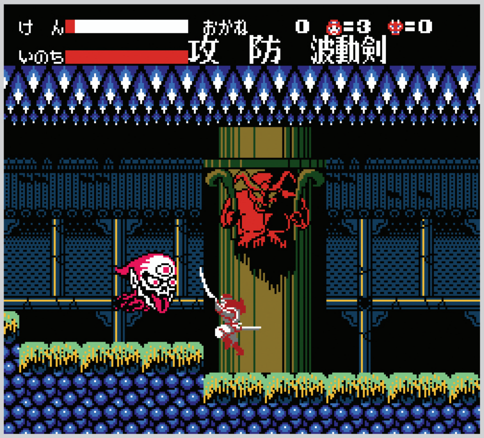
That aside, the connections to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles reach deeper, at least in regards to Konami's NES title. Though Fuma's pixel art rendition looks more akin to a member of the Belmont clan, the sweeping overhead slash he uses to swing his sword is unquestionably similar to the unique method used by Leonardo, the Turtles' leader and resident katana wielder. The looser controls seem to imply some further relation between the two games, along with some shared sound effects.

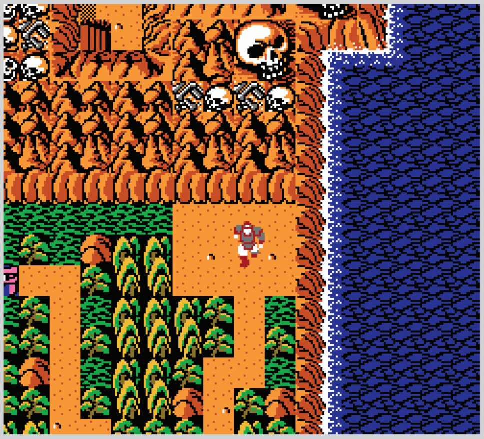
Though there are similarities, make no mistake: GetsuFumaDen is very much its own title. For one thing, it features a more traditional life system, unlike TMNT, which eschewed such a system in favor of having each of the four ninja teens represent a "life," except that losing one only meant they were captured and could be rescued later on.

GetsuFumaDen also has other features not seen in the Turtles' tour of New York, including item shops and three first-person mazes which must be successfully navigated in order to proceed.

While Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles became a smash success, selling 4,000,000 copies and even becoming a pack-in game for the European NES (under the alternate title "Teenage Mutant *Hero* Turtles"), the success of its arcade counterpart would effectively eclipse it and dictate much of the direction for the video game branch of the franchise for years to come. Nevertheless, it did enjoy a short-lived return to prominence in 2007 when it took the unique role of a licensed game on the Wii Virtual Console, where players had to pay an extra 100 Wii Points for the privilege of playing it.

Despite GetsuFumaDen reviewing well in its day, its legacy would not prove much more lasting, amounting to releases across the three Virtual Consoles – though still only in Japan – and various references in other titles. That may yet change, as Konami readies the new GetsuFumaDen: Undying Moon. However, its genre shift to a roguelite hack-'n-slash means that those looking for a spiritual successor to the NES TMNT might need to continue their search elsewhere. **– DAVID**





CHARACTER PROFILE
SHREDDER

Having already covered most of his video game history, let's turn our attention to his depictions in other media!

FIRST APPEARANCE
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1 **(COMIC, 1984)**

CAREER HIGHS | CAREER LOWS

When the TMNT hit the silver screen, they were faced at last with a truly intimidating take on The Shredder, brought to life by actor James Saito.

'90

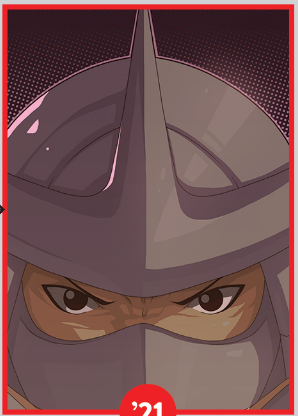
The second cartoon series also had a more serious spin on the villain, along with a wild plot twist . . . this time, Shredder was secretly an alien!

'03

The 2012 cartoon made him human once more. Most iterations of the character depict a man named Oroku Saki as Shredder's true identity.

'12

Across all of the different TV shows, movies, comics and video games over the years, there have been dozens of different versions of Shredder to appear and oppose our heroes. How will the new Shredder's Revenge game choose to portray him?



'21

If Tribute Games stays true to the '87 show, Shredder might cry and call out for Krang's help when he gets beat up! Maybe they'll take a bit of liberty and have him act a little more menacingly than that, though.

'84

The original Shredder was introduced in the Turtles' first comic . . . but he also died in that same issue too! Not the strongest of first impressions.

'87

The 1987 cartoon take on Shredder helped popularize the TMNT series, but he was ultimately a whining goof who threw toddler-like tantrums.

'18

The fourth animated series, Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, cast aside reality entirely to feature a Shredder who is a crazed demon!

HIGHLIGHTS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
LIVE-ACTION MOVIE, 1990

The success or failure of the first TMNT film hinged largely on audiences being sold on the idea that a guy who's named himself after a cheese grater could present a true threat to the butt-kicking teen heroes – and it did. Shredder's power was firmly established in the climactic final rooftop battle against the villain. The Turtles won in the end, of course – but Shredder wasn't gone for good!

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
IDW COMIC SERIES, 2011 – PRESENT

Arguably the most intense interpretation of Oroku Saki and his sheer willpower to never give up in his quest to destroy the Turtles has been featured in the ongoing IDW comic series, first published a decade ago and still running to this day. Shredder even got his own stand-alone series a couple of years ago when *(spoiler!)* he defied death and began battling out of, uh, Heck!

LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER
KARAI

Many versions of Oroku Saki have been fathers! The daughter of Shredder is named Karai, and she almost always begins her story as a fierce enemy of the Turtles. Twists and turns in her tale quickly follow: Sometimes she switches sides and becomes an ally of our heroes, and other times she claims the title of Shredder for herself!

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

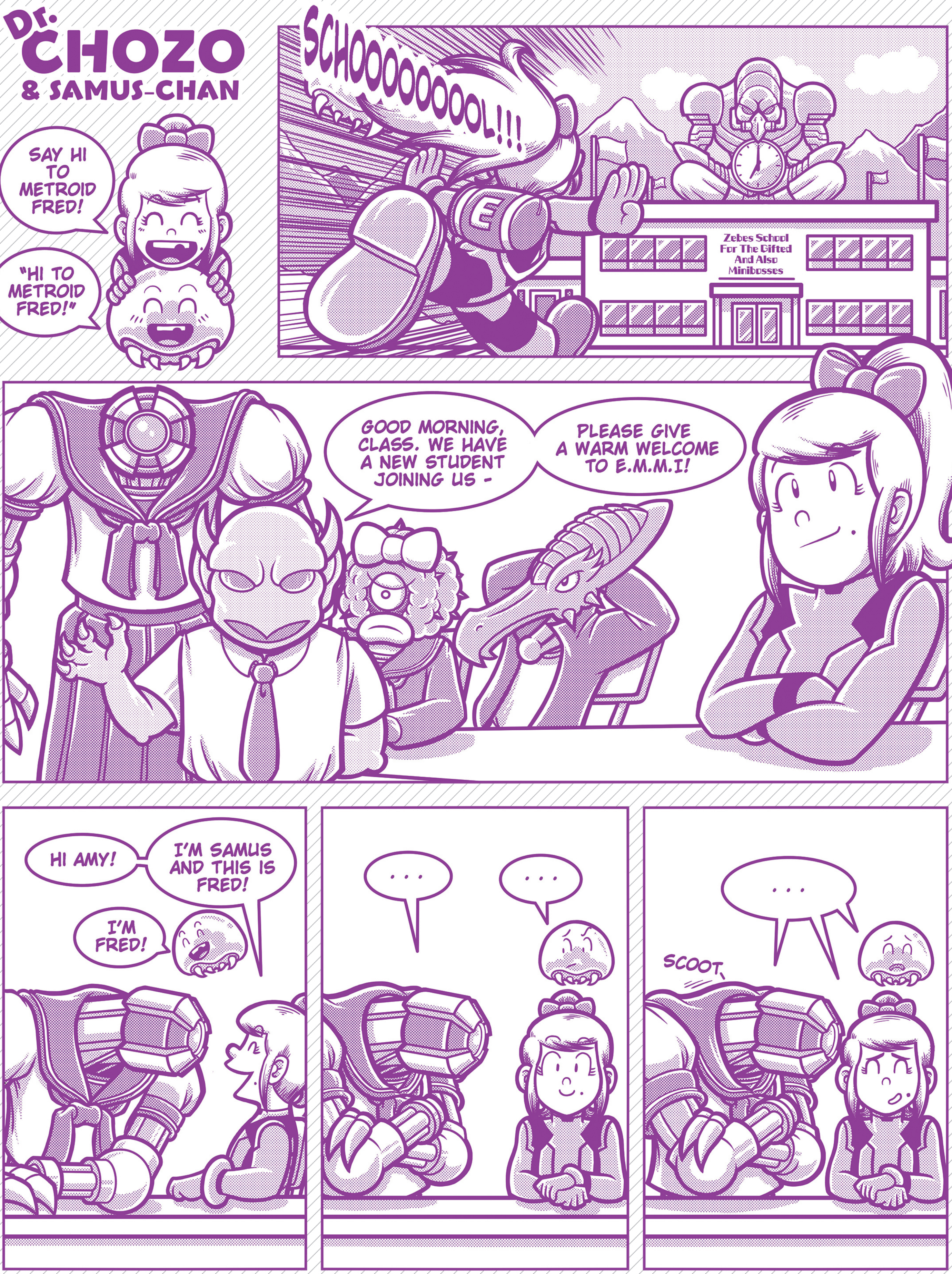
MUTAGEN-INFUSED

SUPER SHREDDER

First appearing in the second live-action movie in 1991, Super Shredder is an insane, out-of-control, overpowered abomination. Having been driven mad by his inability to defeat the Turtles as a mere human, Shredder intentionally chooses to become the thing he hates the most: a mutant! Subjecting himself to the transforming power of the same kind of mutagen that created the Turtles to begin with, Shredder hulks out with massive muscles and an even more unwieldy array of blades arranged all over his body. And while the first Super Shredder from that 1991 film appeared to still be mostly human – he looked like a crazy buff pro wrestler – more recent incarnations of this transformation have forced old Oroku Saki to lose even more of his humanity in his unhinged lust for victory. The version pictured above is the beast from the 2012 toon!

"You are here because the outside world rejects you. THIS is your family. I am your father. I want you all to become full members of the Foot. There is a new enemy: freaks of nature who interfere with our business. You are my eyes and ears. Find them! Together we will punish these creatures, these . . . turtles."

- TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (LIVE-ACTION MOVIE, 1990)



BY THOR THORVALDSON

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
May 30, 1962 in Portland, Maine

FAVORITE FOOD
Pizza! (At least, back when he and Peter Laird were working on the earliest TMNT issues.)

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT
He had a cameo in a Toxic Avenger movie. (Another heroic mutant whose "adult" stories also spun off into a kids' cartoon.)

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Writer and Artist working on Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Last Ronin

BEST KNOWN FOR
Co-creating the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles!

KEVIN EASTMAN

The very first Ninja Turtle leapt to life from this legendary artist's endlessly creative mind. We're honored to speak to him about how far TMNT has come ever since!

INTERVIEW BY KRIS RANDAZZO & JONATHAN HOLMES

JONATHAN: Thanks so much for taking the time today Kevin. Kris and I have been big fans since the early days.

KEVIN: I really appreciate it. I always say that I have the greatest job in the world because I have the greatest fans, so we really appreciate all the support. I can't believe I'm almost 60 years old and I'm still drawing comics for a living.

JONATHAN: And still drawing really well, too! I just got the new issue of The Last Ronin, and it was amazing. I'm glad you kept the pages you drew there a surprise. These are yours, right? *(holds up a copy of the latest issue of The Last Ronin)*

KEVIN: Yep.

JONATHAN: I thought so. It was such a thrill to open up a new comic and to see your line art again. It's been a decade or more since I had that feeling! And it's so emotional to see what looks like the final story for these characters.

KEVIN: Yeah, we built The Last Ronin universe around a story that Pete and I wrote in 1987 set 30 years in the future, in what would have been 2017 when we wrote it back in 1987.

So when Tom and I were finishing wrapping up the first hundred issues of the IDW series – and thanks again to all the fans that supported that because it's been such a blast and it's still ongoing, of course – I said, well, I've got this story that Pete and I wrote. Let's dust it off and revamp it and take it into the future and really adapt it in a way that is special and unique, that leans heavily on the Mirage universe, but also making it oversize, like the original large comic books, longer, 40 pages. Which is why I think we continually run late – finishing up is lot of work! *(laughs)* But we love it. It's just been an absolute blast and has certainly been completely hands-on.

I feel like I'm kind of the director of the movie, if you will. I get to work with the most talented cast and crew, from the Escorza brothers to Ben Bishop, and then I get to throw in a few of my own pages as a cameo appearance, as well as continue my collaboration with my long-time writing partner Tom Waltz.

JONATHAN: It sounds like you're having an amazing time, and we're hoping to talk with Tom, too, at some point. But for this magazine, I don't know if I introduced the publication we're interviewing you for, but it's a magazine called Nintendo Force, which is kind of like Nintendo Power. It's like a modern Nintendo Power.

KEVIN: Sweet.

JONATHAN: So we're going to ask a fair amount of video game-focused questions. We know you're not a developer, but I know you did work on the Heavy Metal game from the Dreamcast, and you've been involved with a lot of the Turtles games. So to stay on that path, our first question ties together The Last Ronin with Shredder's Revenge, the new Turtles game that's coming out soon. Shredder's Revenge is a callback to the 1989 Turtles arcade game, while Last Ronin is going back to a script, as you said, that you started in 1987. So we're wondering, why are things aligning in this particular way now? What's bringing us back to this late '80s era of Turtles history at this point in 2021?

KEVIN: It's a great question, and it's interesting when you look at things like the collector's market – like, what did that Mario Bros. video game just sell for?

KRIS: Super Mario 64.

JONATHAN: Sold for like a million and a half dollars.

KEVIN: And that seems to be the trend. We've seen exorbitant numbers not only on Turtles video games, wrapped still in the package. And I tell you, that's one of the things that when I go to comic conventions – and I can't wait to go back to comic conventions – but when I've done conventions in the past, one of the things I sign as much as anything else is video games. It's like all those Nintendo cartridges, some unopened packages, just the game itself, because they still have it and it's got dog bite marks on it and stuff *(laughs)*, and we love it.

But no, to your question, I think it's all sort of a throwback to people of that era who are now of age, who still don't want to let that inner child go. They don't want to let go of the things that inspire them and things that we loved. The fun stuff. It's still going to be an important part of our life. And I think it's great. So we definitely, all of us, as grown-up children of pop culture and things from all these different time periods, it's great to see a lot of the throwback stuff get some recognition, because that was some really fun stuff and really special at that time.

JONATHAN: Absolutely. And I'm sharing it all with my kid now. He loves Turtles in the same way I do, but from a different angle because of the age difference.

KRIS: Same here.

JONATHAN: So speaking of that, and I love that you called yourself sort of the director of The Last Ronin, we were wondering if you have any ideas off the top of your head about how you would go about overseeing and maybe directing a Last Ronin video game, if that were possible.

KEVIN: I'd love it. The thing that always interests me in games is that, as you know, as they've evolved from the earliest days, well, the storyline used to be about going from challenge to challenge to challenge. Again, going back to the comic conventions, I had fans that used to come up in the early days when that first Nintendo game came out and they'd be angry with me because we made the game really hard. And I'm like, you know, we didn't! Pete and I didn't make the game by ourselves!

But I like that games, as they've evolved, have become more detailed in their stories and setpieces and become capable of offering much fuller adventures. So I think that there are a lot of possibilities that you can bring into a universe like Last Ronin with a game. We've had lots of Easter eggs and cameos and things like that from all Turtle universes in Last Ronin, and I could see them working great in a game too. There's tons of potential in the idea. It could be a really fun story to do and tell, and a chance to dig deep on some stuff that the fans would . . . dig.

JONATHAN: I bet! We were actually talking to the Shredder's Revenge developers and I begged them to put Last Ronin Michelangelo in as an overpowered secret character. So hopefully they'll follow up with you on that!

And speaking of overpowered, just yesterday a new Nickelodeon fighting game called All-Star Brawl was announced, and it has Leonardo and Michelangelo in it! And they're beating up adorable cartoon children! The little girls fight back though. They're tough – one from a show called Hey Arnold! and another one from The Loud House. So I'm wondering how it feels to see your characters cross over with these other Nickelodeon characters in a fighting game, and how you feel about all the other crossovers they've done?

KEVIN: The crossover stuff is so exceptionally fun and cool, especially when you go back to Issue #1 of the Turtles, when we never thought we'd sell more than a handful of copies of the first issue. And now we're in Year 36, 37 that's been ongoing and it's all your fault, all of you fans *(laughs)*, but it's become this thing that has a basis in all our histories of that stuff we were talking about before, the pop culture we grew up with. So when you start seeing the Turtles and He-Man, which we almost had a crossover there, and Turtles and Batman and Turtles dressed as Ghostbusters and that kind of crossover, it just blows me away. Playmates did one of my favorite crossovers: Turtles and Star Trek characters, which was . . .

JONATHAN: Whoa.

KEVIN: . . . and Universal Studios monsters too. The fan in me is just blown away. I love it. I think that, you know, the fact that our characters can now share space with some of the biggest icons of pop culture is just such a huge compliment. I'm continually blessed, and surprised, and thrilled.

JONATHAN: I can only imagine. Kind of going from the other direction, there's a lot of icons in the world of video games, but there hasn't been a lot of success in taking video game characters and putting them in comic books, outside of a handful of winners here and there. But is there any video game property or Nintendo property that you would want to adapt to comics, maybe more successfully than others have done?

KEVIN: Well, it's tough because there's so many. We have a 15-year-old son and he's like, you know, going from Minecraft to Fortnite to Rocket League to this and that. And when he was watching all the Marvel Universe movies, for example, and he's like, "Oh, this Thanos is the greatest bad guy ever!" And I go, "I've got a whole bookshelf. You should see this graphic novel." Then later he comes home

from one of the movies that he saw with one of his mates, before my wife Courtney and I got to see it. And he says, "Oh Dad, I don't want to tell you what happens. I don't want to give away any spoilers." And I'm like, "I've read all the comic books. There's nothing to spoil." But the point being is, he loves the genre. He loves the movies. He loves the games. But it doesn't translate to comics for him. It doesn't make him say, "I want to go and pick up a comic based on this character." So it is tough. It's like, what could you pick from games that would translate into a comic book universe? Because I think there are fans that like both, but I think there's still a separation. A lot of people still don't want to do both.

JONATHAN: Well even if it wasn't hugely successful, is there any Nintendo property you like that you would want to make a comic out of just for fun? Or if they just gave you a billion dollars to do it?

KEVIN: If they gave me a billion dollars, I'd probably spend most of it, you know, doing something else. And then in the last week, I'd try to throw something together *(laughs)*. No, I can't bring a project to mind, but I'm interested in the fantasy stuff and the action-heavy stuff which sort of suits that kind of Turtle universe, which is a foundation you can tell lots of stories from. So I wouldn't want to do a comic with a story like "Here's a character and you just run that character through the paces with bigger adventures and setpieces in mind." You need more than that.

JONATHAN: Right. That makes sense. But that can be fun in games, going from setpiece to setpiece. And that makes me wonder, out of all the Turtles video games, which is your favorite?

KEVIN: You know, I immediately go to the arcade game. The first NES game, like a lot of people, I couldn't get past the water level. But I liked when they finally came out with the arcade game because then you can play with a bunch of your friends. It was more like a team effort to play together and enjoy that experience. So I would lean toward that, but Turtles in Time I thought was fantastic. Even if I couldn't play them very well for very long, I would still try to. Pete *[Peter Laird, the co-creator of the Turtles]* was much better at them than I was. At some point I was always going like "Uhhhhh, I should probably be drawing." *(laughs)*

THE LAST RONIN

Following in the "foot"steps of Old Man Logan, Usagi Yojimbo: Senso and The Dark Knight Returns, The Last Ronin tells the final story of the TMNT. It's a gripping tale of grief, hope, coping with the way time has changed you and surviving, with the help of your friends, in a world that no longer accepts you. A must-read for adult fans of the TMNT, three issues are available now and the fourth is set for September.

JONATHAN: This next question's from our Editor-in-Chief, who loves the Turtles and loves video games. "Kevin, it's said that Raphael is your favorite Turtle. But due to the small size of his sais, he's often become the weakest of the four in video game adaptations! Everyone always goes for Donatello thanks to his bo's long reach. What do you think about that, and how can Raph overcome his shortcomings?"

KEVIN: Well, it's a really good question because of my concept of Raphael and what I wanted to do with him as a character. He's really based heavily on Wolverine, who's all about his claws and in-close fighting. And Wolverine is just such a, you know, an SOB, so his whole berserker mentality is like . . . he's the guy you want to throw in the middle of a fight. The Tasmanian devil you want to throw into the mix and tear it up. But Raphael has actually evolved from there.

It started with an idea I had for the IDW comic, where I had Splinter retraining the characters to use all the weapons – not just the ones that they've always used as their signature trademarks. And that was the basis for the creation of Last Ronin, which is where Michelangelo has all of them. He's got Leo's sword and he's got Donatello's staff and he's got nunchucks and sai.

Taking a step back, it really applies to the whole Bruce Lee philosophy of Jeet Kune Do, sort of embracing a lot at once and then you'll be the ultimate master. So in the games, I think that what we need to do is . . . well, just throw a Last Ronin in there at some point. *(laughs)*

JONATHAN: Bruce Lee said, "Be like water so you can fit into any vessel." Is that right?

KEVIN: Yep. Yeah. I think I just used a line very, very similar to that. I'm just wrapping up writing Issue #4 of The Last Ronin right now. So it's a perfect analogy.

JONATHAN: Do you go back and play the old games sometimes, for nostalgia, or are you too busy drawing, as you said earlier?

KEVIN: My fear is that because I do like them, I might like them too much. I'm worried that instead of being over there or working on finishing a page, before I know it an hour goes by and I'm still goofing around in the game or watching my son play. A lot of times when I play with my son, it's watching him play it and then I go, "Oh! I'd die in two seconds." And he'll play for an hour, and I'm sitting there, still watching. But no, I enjoy them. I enjoy the technology. I enjoy that the kids can play them better than I ever will in my entire life. And just the creativity and the technical aspect of what you can do in games these days is just mind-boggling. So I'm a big, big fan of the medium. Just not smart enough to play them as much as I'd like to.

JONATHAN: The feeling is mutual. Kris and I play them for a job. But when I'm not playing a game for work, I rarely have time to play just to kill time. It happens to a lot of adults when work becomes a big part of their life. I'm wondering if any games have inspired your work, or if likewise you've noticed that any games were inspired by your work. You know, the first thing I thought of growing up playing the Super Mario games was . . . "The Turtles came out in 1984. Mario starts fighting a giant mutant-looking turtle-man who lives underground in 1985. Is that a coincidence?" So I've always wondered, did anything happen there?

KEVIN: No, I think it's just a pop culture thing that just kind of happens sometimes. I think that real life – real world events and things like that – inspire comics and pop culture and movies all the time, even if we don't always realize it. And I think it goes back and forth. You know, I just love seeing people talk about all the things that Star Trek inspired, from cell phones to tricorders to everything in between. So I think with the Turtles and King Koopa happening around the same time in the '80s . . . it's one of those things. I think it crosses back and forth constantly and continually and I think it will continue to do so. And I love it.

KRIS: All right: quick, silly question. If Mario met the Ninja Turtles, considering all the turtles that Mario has stomped over the years, do you think they would get along?

KEVIN: They'd probably go find the closest pizza place and enjoy a massive, massive pizza, and some linguini and I don't know . . . *(laughs)*

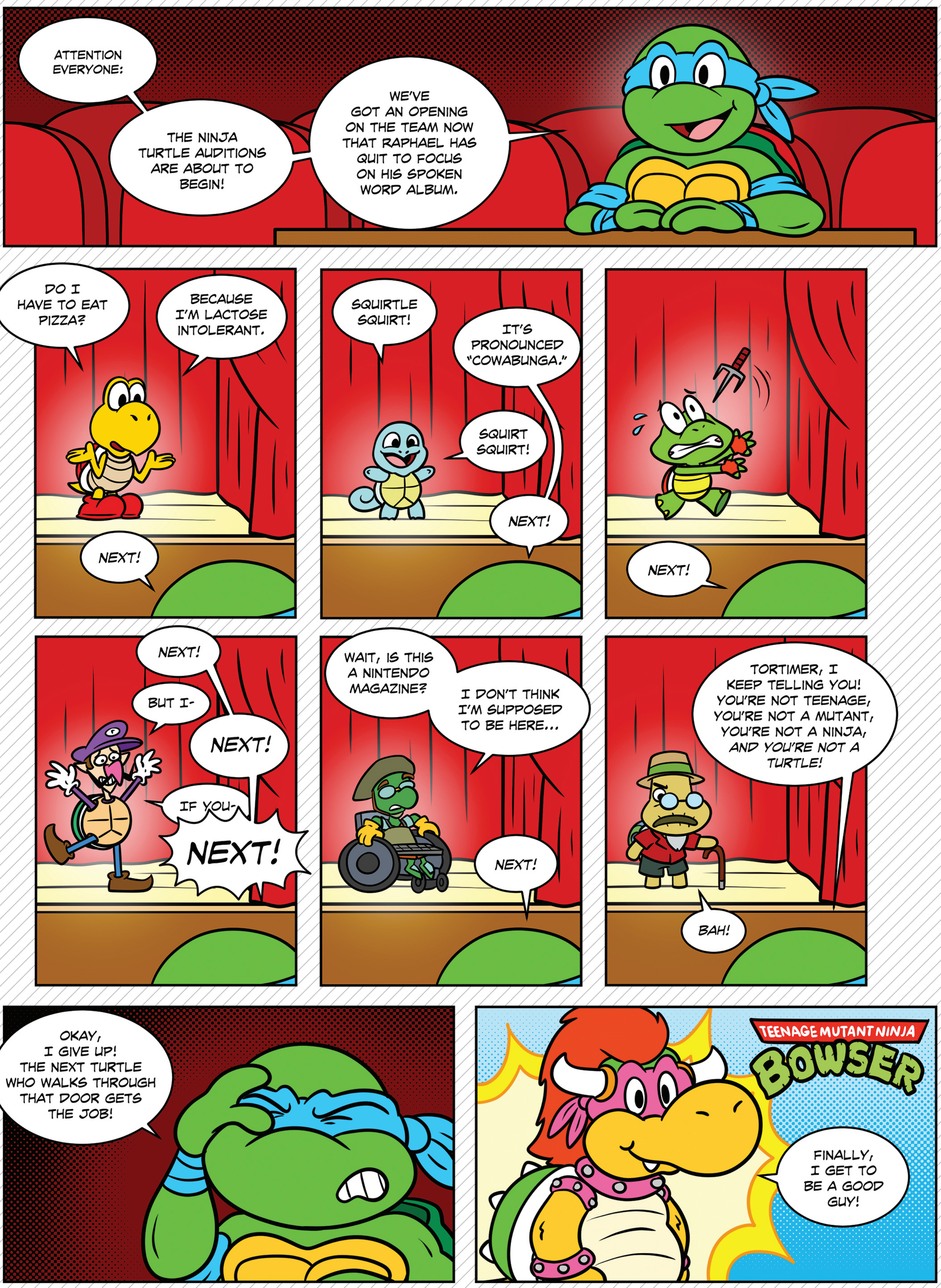
JONATHAN: You're absolutely right! They would go eat. I'm playing Luigi's Mansion 3, where you go into Mario's hotel room and it's covered in empty pizza boxes . . .

KEVIN: *(laughs)* We're definitely going to revisit this again one day. Maybe after the new Turtles video game comes out, I'll play it and we can talk about that.

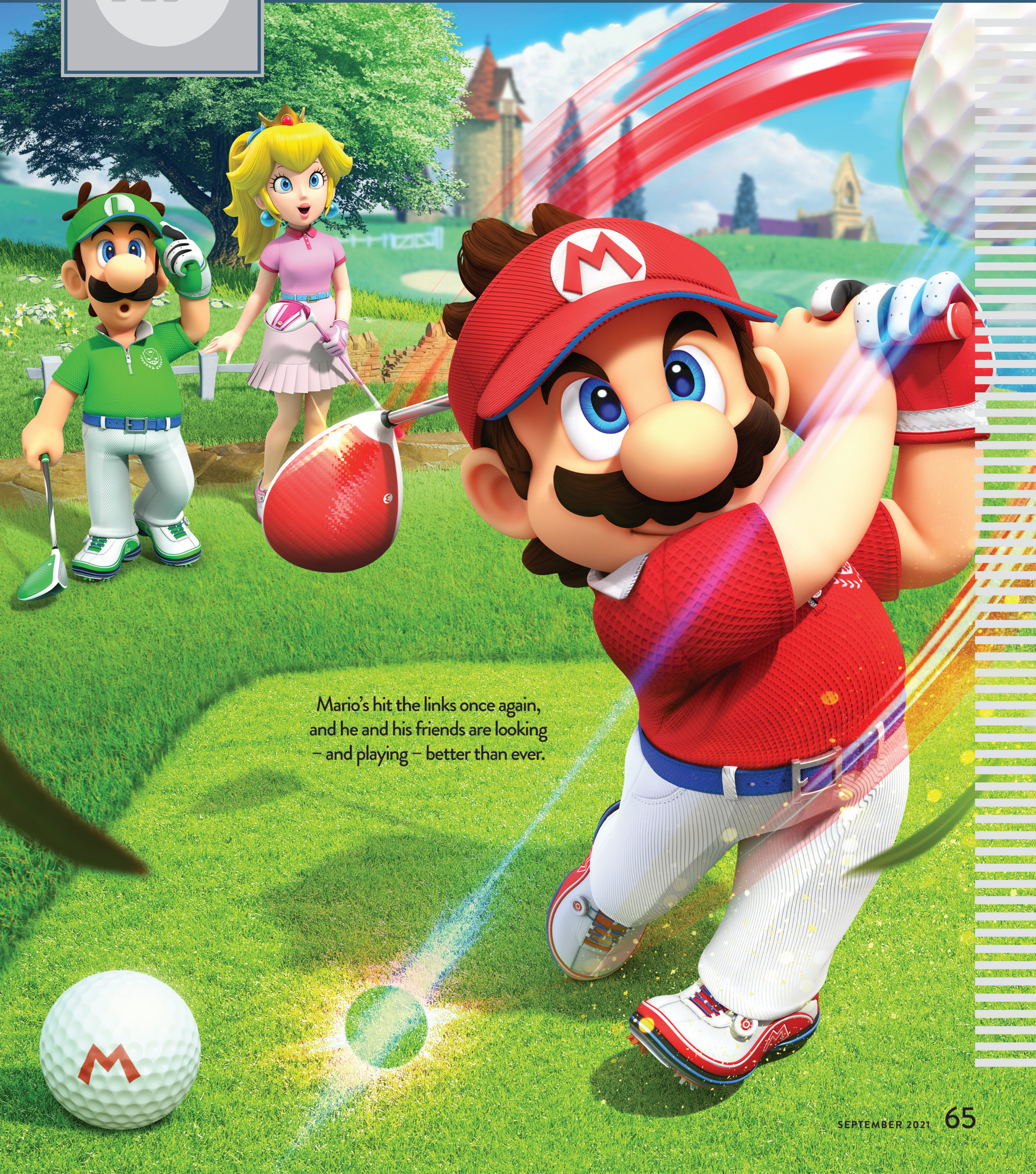
KRIS: We would be thrilled to talk to you again, any time. Absolutely.

JONATHAN: Any time, you name it. Any time, day or night, we will be here. It's been such a pleasure.

KEVIN: It was fantastic. Appreciate the time. Cheers!



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN



Mario's hit the links once again, and he and his friends are looking – and playing – better than ever.

SWITCH
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: CAMELOT
RATING: E

King Bob-omb Has a Blast!

MARIO GOLF: SUPER RUSH

THE MAIN CHARACTER of the all-new and long-awaited Mario Golf: Super Rush is none other than that grand half man, half munition, King Bob-omb. That is, according to my adamant 3-year-old. He refuses to let me select any other character, so much of my time spent with this Switch sequel has been spent staring at the majestic moustache of a bomb man.

I don't mind it. King Bob-omb is a power character, after all, and it's always nice to be able to drive golf balls farther off the tee than anyone else. His counterbalancing drawback is made apparent immediately afterward, though, when I have to press the Control Stick forward to try to motivate this big bomb ball to move.

He's slow! And while normally foot speed has no bearing on games of golf, it's a critical component here in Super Rush, which focuses much of its attention on its brand-new Speed Golf mode. In it, you're not instantly transported to the location where your ball lands in order to attempt your next shot. Rather, you have to hoof it there yourself, taking off at a run right after completing your swing, racing against your opponents who are each also trying to complete the entire task of getting the ball to the green and into the hole in as little time as possible.

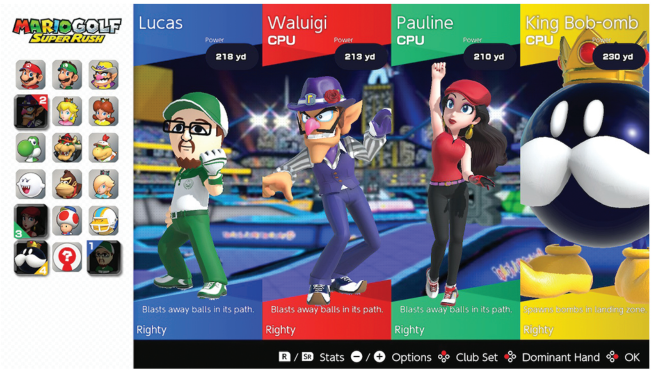
It's a refreshing addition to the Mario Golf formula. Traditional golf is still here, so you can play Super Rush just the same way as you enjoyed this series years ago on N64 or GameCube, if you want to. But I love that this Switch sequel has offered something truly new and different, so it doesn't just feel like an HD encore of those older games.

Speed Golf's "run after your ball" foundation is then built upon further in Battle Golf and XC Golf. Battle Golf is kind of like a Mario Kart game's battle mode, in that it pits four players against each other in an enclosed space and has everyone attacking each other with special shots and explosives, all while simultaneously trying to sink shots into scattered holes around the arena faster than anyone else. It's fun, but often rounds are over so quickly that I didn't feel the need to revisit it too often.

XC Golf, though, totally clicked with me. It's a golf/puzzle/platformer hybrid combo challenge that pits you against the environment and sets you loose. You've got to sink shots into nine different holes, but you have a limited amount of total shots to use to do it, and you have to choose the best route through a mountainous course full of steep elevation changes too. It's wild – like a full evolution of the golf/platformer Peanut Butter & Chocolate gameplay I praised Itchy & Scratchy in Miniature Golf Madness for five issues ago.

But there's a problem: It's stuck in story mode. You can't choose to play XC Golf right from the main menu, as it's only accessible at one point during a playthrough of "Golf Adventure," the included lite golf RPG starring your Mii. So players that ignore that piece of the Super Rush package will miss one of the game's best parts entirely.

Though not everyone shares my admiration for XC Golf, and that's due to another problem in Golf Adventure: out-of-whack pacing and progression. In this RPG-ish mode, you start as an aspiring golf student and work your way up through the ranks. A thin plot threads together a string of tutorials that teach you each gameplay mechanic one at a time, then you're put to the test with a series of progressively more difficult challenges and golf tournaments against A.I. opponents to prove your mastery. As you beat each test, you level up and can increase your character's stats, giving them more power for their drive shots, more control over the ball's flight in the air and so on. That path to progress is fine. The problem is that some gameplay mechanics are locked away until you reach certain parts of the story – and the elevation-taming lob shots best suited to XC Golf aren't given to you until after it's over.



Frustration didn't get me down, but other players have been annoyed at that design choice, and understandably so.

I was more put off by the odd role-playing/fantasy stuff that popped up in the back half of Golf Adventure. It starts as this simple tutorial framework to teach the game to you, but then weirdly diverges past the mid-point into a quest that has you seeking a Lightning Sword and a Flame Orb and fighting weird boss battles. I just raised my eyebrow all the way through the final hours until the credits rolled.

And, of course, the greatest offense of Golf Adventure is that the great King Bob-omb isn't featured at all! I like my Lucas Mii character just fine – he's been a part of my Nintendo gaming for nearly 15 years at this point – but it would have been nice to be able to use some of the more colorful Mushroom Kingdom characters to clear the story challenges. (Again, XC Golf is limited by that restriction, as it can only be played by your Mii.)

None of these shortcomings have soured the overall Super Rush experience for me, though. On the whole, this is an expertly crafted revival of the series that hadn't seen a new home console release since Toadstool Tour in 2003. It's gorgeous to behold, with a great variety of courses to play that start simply then grow into full-blown Mario madness.

Seriously, the first course is a basic grassy country club with no hint of Mario-ness in sight, but the last one is fully Bowser's Castle and its volcanic surroundings, with Whomps, Bullet Bills and Chain Chomps all working to force your score into Bogey town.

The cast is diverse and hilariously animated (though I wish every character got special golf outfits – some, like Boo, Yoshi and yes, King Bob-omb, all look the same as in other games). The gameplay is smartly updated from the "timed button presses + power meter" baseline laid down decades ago. The music is superb, capturing the triumph of low scores and the agony of highs.

In all, it's incredible, and a great purchase for fans of past installments. And perhaps a patch will add XC as an option up front, too! **– LUCAS**

9.0

English Comes to England

THE GREAT ACE ATTORNEY CHRONICLES

IT'S BEEN ALMOST a decade since the last original Ace Attorney game was released, and while we had the Ace Attorney anime to keep us busy, it was no comparison to the satisfaction you get from presenting the piece of evidence needed to send the accused into a tailspin and repent their sins. Now we have not one, but two excellent adventures many thought would never be released outside of Japan, in The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles. Originally released in Japan on the Nintendo 3DS in 2015 (Adventures) and 2017 (Resolve), these two games have had a near seamless transition from handheld to console. The Ace Attorney series has never looked – or sounded – better.

It's a good thing that we're getting both titles released in one collection – the story from Adventures flows directly into Resolve without missing a beat. And what a long and impactful story it is! Who would expect that a young Japanese college student, Ryunosuke Naruhodo, would become an ace attorney and assist in unraveling a conspiracy with deadly implications for the fledgling alliance between Great Britain and Japan?

After the plans of his best friend, Kazuma Asogi, to study in Great Britain are derailed (that is probably the most spoiler-free way I can say it), Ryunosuke takes up his mantle and receives a crash course on the British court system and its jury trials. Along the way, Ryunosuke and his assistant, Susato Mikotoba – a learned young woman who can hold her own in a courtroom *and* is an accomplished martial artist – meet and team up with esteemed British detective Herlock Sholmes (we all know who he really is) and his assistant, child genius and best-selling author Iris Wilson (ditto), while facing the wrath of prosecutor Barok van Zieks, the Grim Reaper of the Old Bailey, who looks at the foreigners with utter disdain as he tosses wine bottles and breaks "hallowed chalices" with alarming regularity. His reputation comes with a supposed curse: Anyone acquitted in his trials gets shuffled off this mortal coil before too long . . .

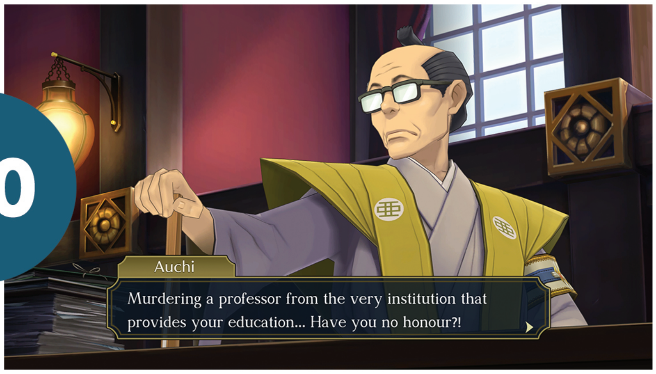
While Sholmes by himself can be a huge goofball, he has his moments of pure brilliance. His personality truly shines during his Logic and Reasoning Spectaculars, where he makes his iconic deductions before Ryunosuke steps in and makes his course corrections, turning an implausible scenario into a more realistic one. These "spectaculars" make great use of different camera angles, stage "lighting" and 3D modeling – you can rotate the characters and settings and inspect them from all angles for clues – but the camerawork for all of these is also artfully done, and a long way from the days of the rudimentary 3D modeling that we saw in Rise from the Ashes (the bonus case of Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney).

There are two new mechanics to contend with: interviewing multiple witnesses in both Japanese and British courts (similar to Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright), and the British court's jury system, where you'll need to listen to each juror's rationale for their vote, press them for more information and then pit one juror against another if their statements contradict each other. It's particularly nerve-racking if you're trying to come back from a deficit, but satisfying when you see the color of their chair change and they send a ball of fire to the Scales of Justice torches behind the judge's bench.

What sets the Great Ace Attorney duology apart from the rest of the Ace Attorney titles is that it's a historical fiction story that's *mostly* reliant on

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T

9.0



the technology and people of the time, instead of the supernatural influences from the original trilogy. The major exceptions: Sholmes and Wilson, who carry around anachronistic steampunk inventions that serve as substitutes for fingerprint dusting, luminol and photo development. While they're useful, forensics aren't yet accepted in British courts as evidence – but there's a lot of creative thinking from the writers in making them believable and acceptable. Still, there's a lot of attention paid by the writers to period technology (coin-operated gas meters) and popular entertainment (The Randst Magazine and Madame Tusspells' wax museum) that really help to color the setting of turn-of-the-century London – warts and all (although I thought it was still a very romanticized interpretation).

One part that I found curious was the fact that the names of many of the Japanese characters were localized into English puns – Susato's best friend Haori Murasame becomes Rei Membami ("remember me") for example – but others were left alone, like the Japanese inspector Satoru Hosonaga. (In one case, if you understand Japanese, one character's name has a *very* ominous meaning.) Given that a lot of these cases are directly influenced by Sherlock Holmes stories, fans will see a ton of Holmesian Easter eggs and references (in case you were wondering, Sholmes does mention the words "seven-per-cent solution," but in a much more family-friendly context) and there are shout-outs to the Ace Attorney franchise as well. And, as always, some modern pop culture references have snuck in as well (but just a few).

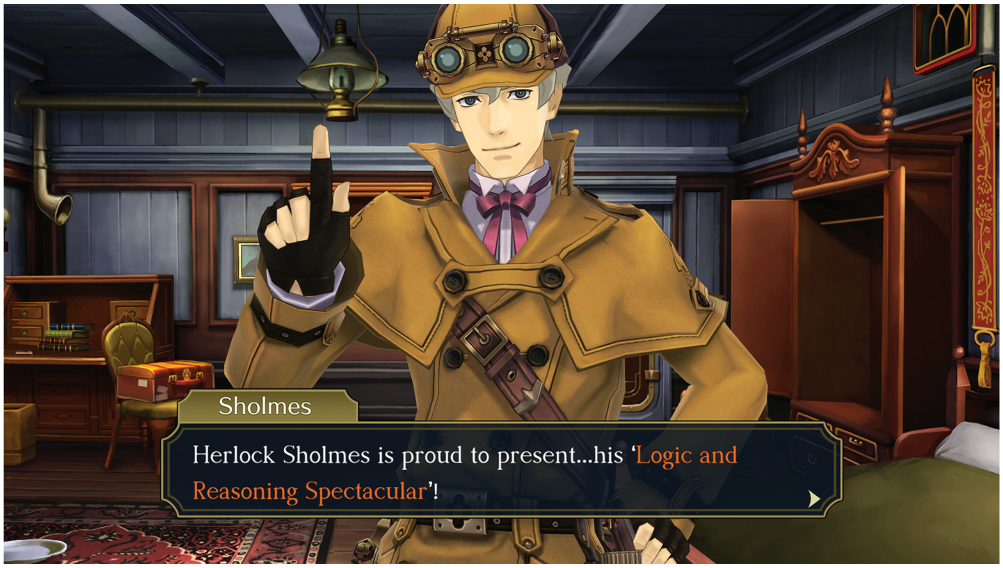
I don't have the Switch version of the original trilogy, so this was my first introduction to the console-based control scheme for the Ace Attorney games. Both button controls and touch controls are supported, and there's a small guide on the bottom right-hand corner of the screen to remind you of the functions. I had a few awkward moments when I didn't know how to exit from crime scene investigation, but I was able to figure it out quickly. (The only thing missing from the whole package: voice recognition.)

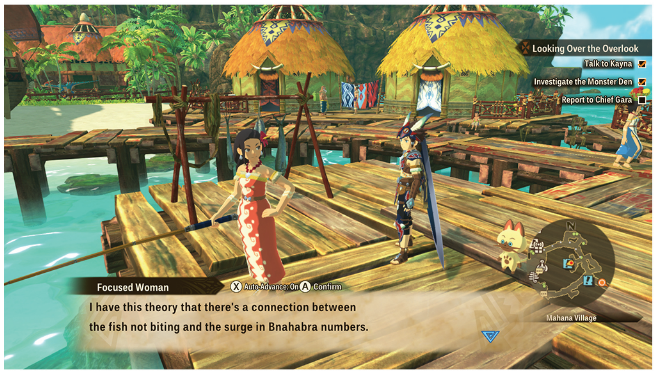
There was one aspect of the original that got a little lost in translation, so to speak, with the port. In Case 5 of Adventures, Ryunosuke and his compatriots are swept up in the current craze hitting London: the stereoscope. This really only made sense on the 3DS. Trying to see the stereoscope pictures in 3D on anything bigger than the screen in Handheld Mode can be uncomfortable – but at least it's only that one case, and thankfully Resolve doesn't have any similar visual gimmicks. (And seeing the cross-eyed looks from Susato and Iris, and Ryunosuke's reaction to them, is hilarious.)

The soundtracks to both games are also perfect. While still sounding modern, they all have the instruments that were typically heard in the Victorian era, especially the suspenseful staccato string themes that are reminiscent of the iconic suspense themes in the original Ace Attorney trilogy. Sholmes' theme prominently includes a solo violin, Iris' is bright and peppy with a few modern bleeps and boops that befit her inventive nature, and the themes for Ryunosuke, Susato and Kazuma feature both Eastern and Western instruments, further adding to the "East meets West" theme.

The overall presentation is a huge improvement over what we've gotten in the past: There's both Japanese and English language audio for the cutscenes and courtroom interjections; all of the special episodes and DLC, along with music and art galleries, are included; there's an option to auto-scroll the dialogue during trial and story portions; and there is also a Story Mode that can be toggled in the menu that turns the games into a kinetic novel. There are some issues in the dialogue that could've been fixed with another proofreading pass, but not as many as in past titles. If there were any changes I would have made to the overall presentation, I would like a glossary of the Victorian English that gets bantered about by some Londoners – there's a lot of Cockney rhyming slang that can easily get lost in translation, and there are only a few occasions when we get an in-game explanation.

If you've never played any of the Ace Attorney titles before, this is an excellent place to start – but it's also a good example of how far we've come since the franchise first was released in the West over 15 years ago! With all the smooth 3D visuals, the excellent music, the extensively researched setting and the great cast of characters, it's leaps and bounds ahead of the original Ace Attorney trilogy, and the story shines just as brightly as the original. If not brighter! **– REBECCA**





Rage of the Razewing Ratha!

MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2: WINGS OF RUIN

IF YOU'VE EVER played a Monster Hunter game and didn't understand the hype, trust me, I've been there.

It seemed like I was missing something when I played Monster Hunter: World and Monster Hunter Rise with my friends. They couldn't get enough, but the gameplay loop of taking down monsters, gaining materials and crafting better gear over and over just didn't grab me.

After playing Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin, though, I finally get it. If you've struggled like I did to get into the franchise, this entry is the one you should give a chance, even if it's a spin-off to the main series.

Monster Hunter Stories 2 takes some of the best parts of previous games – beautiful environments, varied monsters to take on and fun customization – and combines them with a heartwarming narrative and a monster collecting system, where you fight alongside Monsties of your own.

It also offers simpler combat mechanics and uses far less tutorials, which make some of the other series entries daunting to newcomers.

I think Monster Hunter Stories 2 has a lot to offer for established fans of the franchise and RPG lovers too, due to its well-crafted story and gameplay systems.

Storywise, you don't need to play the first Stories to understand what's going on, but if you did, you'll be rewarded with some fun references and character appearances.

In Monster Hunter Stories 2 you take on the role of a customizable Monster Rider. Riders are different from Hunters in that they acquire and train monsters to fight alongside them instead of hunting them down. This relationship between Rider and Monstie is explored in many ways during the narrative, and I enjoyed seeing how different it could be from Rider to Rider.

Capcom did a great job with characters in this story. Since your protagonist is silent, you're accompanied by a Felyne companion, Navirou, who does the talking and whose penchant for cat puns knows no bounds! Along the way, you meet up with more of the cast, from the calm and kind Rider Alwin to Kyle, a Hunter who's got a bone to pick with you right from the beginning.

The protagonist becomes a Rider during a tumultuous time: Rathalos are disappearing everywhere; red pits emitting "Rage Rays" are cropping up and driving nearby monsters mad and you're given a Rathalos egg that holds a monster fated to destroy the world.

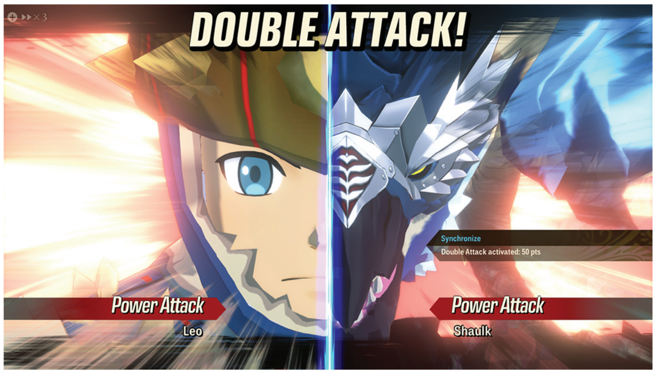
Despite all that doom and gloom, if I could describe the game's story in one word, it'd be wholesome. It isn't groundbreaking, but its fun moments teach you about the world and its inhabitants, and it's balanced by emotional scenes and a neat twist near the end.

Monster Hunter Stories 2's story plays second fiddle to its gameplay, however, and that isn't a surprise for this franchise. As a Monster Rider, you can assemble a team of Monsties to fight by your side while exploring several vibrant locales, which look wonderful both in TV and Handheld Modes on Switch.

The game's combat is different than the fast-paced action you'll find in World and Rise. Monster Hunter Stories 2 employs a turn-based system, where up to two humans (you and a battle buddy) and two Monsties can fight together.

Honestly, I loved this battle system more than anything else in this game. It's easy to learn, but varied enough to stay fresh. At its core, the combat is based on a Rock/Paper/Scissors system of weaknesses, where you have three types of attacks: Power, Speed and Technical, and must learn patterns to know when to use each.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: E10+



If you fight a foe that starts out using Power attacks, you'll want to use Speed attacks to gain the advantage. However, as you're fighting, the enemy could become enraged and change its attack type and move pattern, forcing you to think on your feet. These patterns get tougher to predict the further you get into the game, providing some satisfying battles.

The only frustrating part about combat is that you don't have direct control over your battle buddy and their Monstie. Those moves are determined by A.I., and they'll put you in a bind if the right move is not selected.

The three weapon types: Slash, Blunt and Pierce, add another layer to combat. As you battle monsters, you break different parts off of them, and certain weapon types are more effective against certain parts. This places more importance on crafting, where you turn monster parts into weapons and armor. Thankfully, Monster Hunter Stories 2 simplifies crafting compared to World and Rise, and the flashy designs of weapons and armor will have you exploring in style.

In order to fight, you must gather your team of Monsties, and this system kept me invested in exploring the world in this game. You find monster eggs in dens scattered across the world; the dens spawn randomly, and their interiors are procedurally generated. You can find normal and super rare dens as you explore, but I quickly found out that the normal ones weren't really worth my time due to another mechanic: the Rite of Channeling.

The Rite of Channeling essentially makes you a Monstie genetic engineer, and it was fun to experiment with! Each Monstie you hatch has a set of genes arranged in a grid. Genes are categorized by their color and symbol, which identify what element and type of attack they provide, respectively. The Rite of Channeling allows you to transplant one gene from one Monstie to another – but the Monstie giving the gene will disappear, so you've got to choose wisely.

The Rite of Channeling goes much deeper than that, heading into the overwhelming overcomplexity that detracts from enjoyment in the main series games too. Some of the game's tasks didn't feel necessary, and that was my biggest issue with it overall.

For example, you encounter an organization that will sell items for bottle caps. They are different from the main currency, Zenny, and you have to explore special areas called Everdens to get them. You can purchase additional cosmetic items, recipes, weapons and armor with bottle caps, but I probably looked at this shop a total of three times while playing. With all Monster Hunter Stories 2 already offers, I think it would've been better to just have these items available for purchase with Zenny instead of introducing another currency to hunt for.

Monster Hunter Stories 2's story and gameplay work in tandem to make this entry a standout in the franchise and in the creature collection genre as a whole. The gameplay is addictive, and the story and characters kept me invested in the finer details of the world. Plus, there is plenty to do after you've completed the story. If you're intrigued about this series or a fan who's wondering if it's worth your while, I say give this one a shot. And ride on! **– MAGGIE**

9.0

Be a Real American Hero

G.I. JOE: OPERATION BLACKOUT

SHREDDER'S REVENGE HAS me in a Saturday morning mood. Cartoons can be summoned out of the aether at any time of day and any day of the week now – my kids' daily flocking to Netflix can attest to that – but there was something special about the '80s and early '90s, when the best of the best in animated entertainment could only be seen in each Saturday's A.M. hours. So, in that nostalgic frame of mind and to help pass the time until the new homage to the Ninja Turtles' '80s toon arrives, I've finally been tuning in to a couple of other cartoon games that I bought nearly a year ago, but just hadn't sat down with yet. First up, G.I. Joe!

Like the Turtles, the Joes have been a part of the Nintendo gaming landscape since the NES era. You can go back further than that, even, since the very first G.I. Joe game was an Atari 2600 title from all the way back in 1983! But the NES games were my first exposure: 1991's G.I. Joe and 1992's G.I. Joe: The Atlantis Factor were awe-inspiring run-and-gun takes on the toon that made young gamers like myself feel like we were really taking the fight to Cobra! They laid down a strong foundation . . . that was never built on.

Nearly 30 years passed after the release of The Atlantis Factor before the G.I. Joe brand finally returned to a Nintendo console with this new effort, Operation Blackout, last October. It's wild that we had to wait that long, but thankfully this game plays out a lot like I'd expect it would have even if it had gotten several generations' worth of in-between sequels leading up to it.

G.I. Joe: Operation Blackout is a third-person shooter that drops you into the thick of the fight against the forces of Cobra . . . and then inverts the tale to let you play as the bad guys and fight the Joes, too! You get a total of 12 playable characters across both sides of the equation, including Duke, Roadblock, Snake Eyes, The Baroness, Destro and Cobra Commander.

Each character plays similarly, but they all have unique features, like Roadblock's lightning-blasting zap cannon (seen above) that feels perfectly in line with his character. Being able to become these heroes and villains is the high point here.

Plenty of low points drag things down, though. Most problematic is the feel of the aiming controls – it always seems like your shots are a little off. You've got to be dead-on precise to score a hit on the swarms of robo foes that make up the bulk of the opposition, but they always seem to sidestep right out of your line of fire. There's an auto-aim assist feature, but it only lines up your crosshairs for you on your target's current position when you press the aim button – if they're moving at all, you'll instantly lose track of them and have to adjust with the right stick. As a result, I often felt like I was flailing around, trying to land hits by pure chance.

My kingdom for some motion controls here! If I could somehow transplant Nintendo's perfect Splatoon control scheme here, I'd have so much more fun. Alas, since Operation Blackout was developed as a multi-platform project rather than a Switch exclusive, its creators likely couldn't prioritize such an upgrade in control.

Also a let-down: the A.I. allies. The game supports two-player co-op – which is great, you should grab a pal to play that way – but if you go it alone, the scenarios still seem to be built for two people, and the A.I. that takes command of the second character seems to just stand around, contributing nothing. Take a shot, Lady Jaye! I'm dyin' over here!

Unlockable alternate costumes and G.I. Joe comic book art push you to push through the problems, and true old-school fans might feel motivated to do so. Anyone born later than the '80s, though, probably won't be able to get too invested in this one. Let's hope another attempt at adapting the property appears without having to wait another 30 years! **– LUCAS**

6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: GAMEMILL ENT. DEVELOPERS: IGUANABEE & FAIR PLAY LABS RATING: T

Autobot Tactics

TRANSFORMERS: BATTLEGROUNDS

FOR THE SECOND half of our Saturday morning cartoon double feature, let's take on Transformers: Battlegrounds! This tactics title had also been sitting in my backlog, also since last October, which surprises me a little more than G.I. Joe did, because I'm definitely more of a fan of this franchise when pitting the two against each other. Still, it took the power of the Turtles to finally motivate me to stop putting this one off as well.

Transformers: Battlegrounds is a grid-based strategy game that has you taking command of small squads of Autobots and squaring off against Megatron and his Deception forces. The standard for "turn-based tactics for young players" was set early on in the Switch life cycle by the wonderful Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle, and this product has similar appeal – just not quite as much polish.

The user interface, for example, is not quite as sleek as Ubisoft's version. This becomes apparent immediately when you first go to move one of your heroes to a new space, and the full extent of their movement range gets highlighted on the ground . . . except it's not actually the full extent. The gameplay here is fueled by action points, three per character per turn, and you have the option to spend a second point on movement in order to cover more ground, if you want to. You can even sacrifice an Autobot's opportunity to attack entirely by cashing all three action points in for a further extension of movement range, when you really need to get somewhere else in a hurry. That's cool. But the U.I. doesn't keep up. You have to move your cursor to the outer edge of the highlighted movement range first, then push out to reveal a second tier of available movement spaces, then finally a third. A simple tweak to highlight all the available positions to move to from the start, perhaps with three different hues of highlight, could have streamlined every encounter in the game.

Another annoyance: how ability upgrades are handled. Early on I unlocked the choice to give Windblade and Bumblebee an "Overwatch" power – readying a blast to unleash on the enemy's turn whenever a Decepticon moves into firing range. Cool, right? Mario + Rabbids has a similar feature, as do many other tactics titles. But I discovered too late that equipping the Overwatch caused my heroes' normal blaster shots to be deactivated! I had to play through a whole battle with no ability to shoot bad guys on my turn – only on theirs, in reaction to their moves. That was bothersome. (Though a unique, unintended challenge.)

Both of those complaints are minor, though. You get used to the U.I. and you gain an understanding of how the heroes' loadouts operate after just a few missions, and after that this game is all smooth sailing.

Transformers: Battlegrounds is just a fun take on the brand! It's low-stress strategy with fun characters and not too much complexity, making it an ideal entry point into this whole style of gaming that can easily sit right alongside Mario + Rabbids.

Kids who already have some familiarity with the brand will be the most likely to get invested, of course. The Transformers saga has had multiple different cartoons, comics and toy lines over the decades, but this one is based on Transformers: Cyberverse, which first debuted in 2018. Not being personally familiar with that show didn't hold me back from enjoying this since the characters are pretty similar to their old '80s iterations, but I was taken aback at a few updates to the cast. Apparently Grimlock now only speaks like a mindless beast while he's in dinosaur form? Because he shifts into robot mode for dialogue scenes and there speaks like a perfectly polite and intelligent gentleman. Who knew?

Given another pass of polish, some deeper gameplay, a greater variety of missions and a larger roster of hero characters, a potential Battlegrounds sequel could be something special. The developers at Coatsink have built a solid starting structure here. With luck, maybe they'll get the chance to enhance it further! **— LUCAS**

7.5

SWITCH
PUBLISHER: OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER: COATSINK
RATING: E10+

A Solid Second Strike

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD HD

I HAVE COMPLETED my second playthrough of Skyward Sword (now in HD!) and have come to one conclusion: Memory is a funny thing.

I recounted my personal experience of playing the original Wii version last time, but as a reminder, it launched just two weeks after my first son was born, so playing through its quest, for me, overlapped entirely with the "just figuring out how to be a new Dad" season of life. Much of the adventure was played while holding baby Carter in my lap, soaking in the joy of fatherhood, thrilled to be sharing the game's journey with him.

. . . While not retaining many memories of the actual game itself, it seems. That's what struck me about playing Skyward Sword again the most: So much of it felt so fresh this time through! My brain truly must have been in a baby fog the first time around. These dungeons seemed like I'd never explored them before. Some standout moments had stuck with me, but the in-betweens connecting them all together had not. It felt like playing a brand-new Zelda!

I'm hopeful other returning players are sharing this sentiment, as this is a Zelda that deserves to be treated as a brand-new game. Skyward Sword has been legitimately improved upon in its jump to HD. Those Lowest Lows we lamented last time? Many actually did get addressed! Let's run the list.

First, the motion controls. Still in place and still functional by way of the Joy-Con controllers, and still finicky in the sense that you still need to recalibrate your aim quite a bit while you play. But that's been counterbalanced by the brilliant button controls newly added here, which make the whole quest so much more comfortable.

It takes a while to learn the new control scheme – especially the sword being mapped to the right stick. I was frustrated by it at first, as I thought it was unresponsive with my thumb resting on top. I found a lot more success when I took my thumb off, though, and began flicking the stick from side to side, up to down and so on with quick motions. That made the combat feel perfect, and way more precise than the old method of waving the Wii Remote through the air.

Second, Fi's interruptions have been drastically reduced. While a few of the old heavy-handed helper bits seem to have slipped through the cracks, for the most part the sword spirit has been silenced outside of cutscenes. My only critique here is that on the few occasions when I did ask for her advice or a puzzle hint, the dialogue that appeared wasn't any help at all. I called her up for intel in the first Ghirahim battle, and she said, "Master, your wallet is full. You will not be able to collect any more Rupees than you currently carry." OK. Thanks for that relevant info right now, Fi.

Third, The Imprisoned. No improvements here. You still have to slash this toothy goober's toes in three separate battles, and the recycling of that same encounter (with a few twists each time) is still a drain on the whole game's fun factor. A shame.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+

There's a lot of recycling happening in Skyward Sword, really, that I noted more this time through. Each over-world area is used in multiple ways: first as a space of exploration and puzzle solving, then again as the site of a wide-ranging stealth challenge, then a third time at the end of the story for something wildly different. The Faron Woods, for example, gets totally flooded in the game's final act, which makes it feel completely different, gameplaywise. (While saving a ton of development time versus making a whole new environment for that same sequence.) I appreciated this efficient reuse this time more than before, so our "Disconnectedness" complaint, while not actually addressed, felt like less of a problem nevertheless.

Scrapper? Still a pest. The Barren Sky? Nothing new added. More Lows that remain low. One new minigame island at least would've been nice!

But we go out on a high note, as our last complaint of Handholding was absolutely listened to. Skyward Sword now treats its players like seasoned Zelda fans, thankfully, rather than building its user interface and pop-up text boxes around the assumption that the player is most likely a casual Wii owner whose only previous video game experience was five years' worth of Wii Sports Bowling. Simple tweaks like the elimination of item explanations every time you pick up a Stamina Fruit after a fresh load of your save file go a long way here.

List complete! For those of you keeping score, that's three Lowest Lows that were deliberately improved upon, three that weren't, and one that didn't bother me much any more. Taken together with the glorious visual refresh that high definition has brought to this game's world overall, I'd say this is a port that's proven to be much better than expected.

I do find it a bit odd that there's no "extra" here. Nintendo being addicted to additions in re-releases, as we wrote about earlier this year, I did think we might get *something* new here. Bowser's Fury set expectations high! Alas, no Legend of Groose side story or anything similar.

Still, while such a bonus might have been nice, it isn't needed. The Legend of Zelda games are such grand adventures as they are, and Skyward Sword truly soars now on a level alongside its more universally loved fellow series sequels. Is it as top-tier a title now as Ocarina of Time or Breath of the Wild? I wouldn't want to open up that debate myself, but I'm sure this re-release will have some long-time detractors re-evaluating its merits, as I am now.

It just felt fun. Wholesome. Like coming home. Again, memory is a funny thing – while I remember enjoying my first run with Skyward Sword a decade ago in those new baby days, the 10 years of seeing other players' negative opinions expressed online certainly made me second-guess my own experience.

No longer! Skyward Sword still suffers from a few low-point problems, but on the whole, and especially now with all this HD edition's improvements, it's a wonderful adventure that I would wholeheartedly recommend to all Legend of Zelda fans. Newcomers might want to start simpler with a game like Link's Awakening before leaping into this one, but once you've got a bit of gaming experience under your belt, you're ready to soar these skies. And veterans? It seems like 10 years is right around the right amount of time for memories of a first play-through to fade, so if you only played this quest once before on Wii, definitely give it a second look now. It'll feel like a brand-new Zelda!

So concludes my second time with Skyward Sword, but up next is what I'm most excited for: coaching Carter through his first! **– LUCAS**

9.0

The Latest Retro Repaint

ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD DX

ORIGINALLY ENVISIONED AS a rival for Super Mario Bros. in the console wars of the '80s, Alex Kidd in Miracle World did some things similarly to Nintendo's masterpiece, and others quite differently. That, until recently, we haven't heard anything new from Alex Kidd should tell you all you need to know about how well that went.

Some changes had an easy fix, such as swapping the button layout so that the jump button was no longer in what people would recognize as the equivalent of Nintendo's "B" position, with punching placed on "A."

Others were more ingrained, such as the looser movement and momentum, the harsh hit detection or the Jankenpon boss battles (whether they always followed the same pattern or not). Aspects such as these have played a part in keeping Alex Kidd from appealing to as wide an audience as he might have otherwise.

That isn't to say that this young hero didn't have his fans, however. In parts of the world like Brazil and Europe — markets which Nintendo did not as successfully infiltrate during their 8-bit heyday — Alex Kidd and the Sega Master System fared much better. And it's one of those regions that would give rise to this resurrection of sorts.

In 2018, a group in Spain known as Jankenteam set out to create a fan game remake of Alex Kidd in Miracle World. Then, after things went quiet for a bit, their project re-emerged as a full-fledged official project to be published by Merge Games.

Alex Kidd in Miracle World DX is basically a top-to-bottom remake of the Master System original that's by fans, and for fans. Unfortunately, it's that fan-centric mentality that may prove to be a deterrent to potential new fans.

Graphically, the game uses a pixel art style that is very modern and could easily be mistaken for a more modern 2D visual style at a first glance. There's more animation and other neat touches, such as the onomatopoeias that appear when you punch enemies, the debris that flies when you smash blocks and weather effects that add atmosphere not seen in the original. This helps accentuate the story as well, which is no longer mostly relegated to the manual.

The soundtrack has been remixed and expanded as well, and is more than three times the size of the original game's. There are also new stages that use those added tracks, too. And if you want something a little more vintage, you can swap the graphics and sound to an 8-bit-styled recreation at the push of a button.

Unfortunately, while things have been touched up in some places, someone not as familiar with the original may not notice. Controls still have a unique sense of momentum and feel, even if improved. Hit detection is still a bit harsh, which comes into play more in later levels. And while the boss battles have been reworked, you still have to deal with Jankenpon (Rock/Paper/Scissors) matches before several of them.

Fortunately, Jankenteam is working on a patch to give the game more "modern" physics and better hit detection. However, it hasn't been released as of this writing, and so couldn't factor into this review.

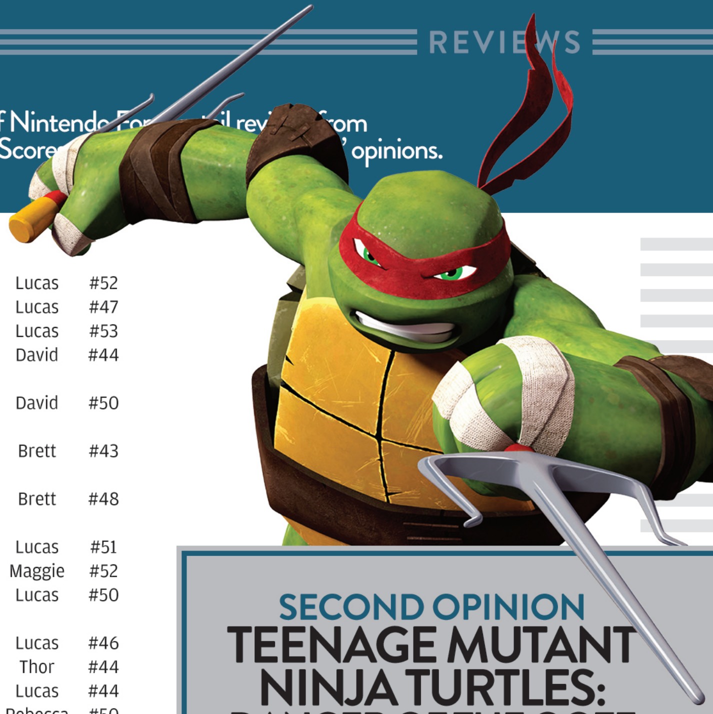
If you're a fan of the original Alex Kidd in Miracle World, then this remake gives you just about everything you could want, and more — and you can add a good point or so to my score. If some of the rougher aspects of the original turned you away, the new unlimited lives option might be enough to compensate . . . or it might not. And if you've never played Alex Kidd before, then you might consider looking at the cheaper SEGA AGES version and decide from there if you want a bigger and better version of that. **— DAVID**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MERGE GAMES DEVELOPERS: MERGE GAMES & JANKENTEAM RATING: E

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo For… rev… from the past two years. Score… ' opinions.



SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
AI: The Somnium Files	8.5	Tony	#44
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Ary and the Secret of Seasons	6.0	Lucas	#49
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Balan Wonderworld	5.0	Lucas	#52
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
Bravely Default II	9.0	Nadia	#52
BurgerTime Party!	8.0	Lucas	#44
Catherine: Full Body	8.5	Jonathan	#49
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues	6.5	Kris	#50
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!	8.5	David	#52
DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power	7.0	Kris	#53
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	7.0	Jonathan	#49
Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Complete Edition	8.5	Josh	#44
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Heroland	7.0	Rebecca	#45
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity	8.5	Tony	#50
Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure!	5.0	Chris	#45
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory	7.0	Tony	#50
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy – Deluxe Edition	8.5	Brett	#45
Luigi's Mansion 3	9.0	Chris	#44
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020	8.5	David	#44
Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit	9.5	Lucas	#49
Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection	9.0	David	#45
Miitopia	7.5	Brett	#53
Model Debut #nicola	7.0	Rebecca	#44
Monster Hunter Rise	9.0	Lucas	#52
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
New Pokémon Snap	9.0	Lucas	#53
New Super Lucky's Tale	9.0	David	#44
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2: Grand Prix	7.0	David	#50
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Persona 5 Strikers	9.0	Maggie	#52
Pikmin 3 Deluxe	9.5	Lucas	#50
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shield	9.0	Thor	#44
Pokémon Sword	8.0	Lucas	#44
Puyo Puyo Tetris 2	8.5	Rebecca	#50
R-Type Final 2	7.5	Jonathan	#53
Ring Fit Adventure	8.5	Matthew T.	#44
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin	8.5	Lucas	#50
Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl – Gold	6.0	Brett	#45
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Story of Seasons: Pioneers of Olive Town	6.5	Rebecca	#53
Super Mario 3D All-Stars	7.0	Lucas	#49
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	7.5	David	#44
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III	9.0	Maggie	#49
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV	9.0	Maggie	#52
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors	7.0	Jonathan	#44
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince	9.0	Lucas	#44
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43

SECOND OPINION

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: DANGER OF THE OOZE

LOOKING SEVEN YEARS back into NF's past, our original review for the currently still newest TMNT title on a Nintendo system appeared in Issue #12, penned by Mr. David Oxford. He praised the design highly, and it sounded amazing: a new Metroidvania starring the Ninja Turtles, and made by WayForward? That's like a dream project!

So I'm kicking myself for taking seven years to play it myself. As David asserted back then, this take on the Turtles is a great one – it captures the vibe of the 2012 cartoon cast perfectly with spot-on animations and voice acting from the show's same actors. It's packed with homages to great games of the past, from the way captured Turtles are found kneeling and roped up just like the first NES game to the fact that new exploration-enhancing power-ups are held by reverent statues before you collect them – a scene brought into New York City straight from Planet Zebes. A combined love of both TMNT and Metroid is in-your-face evident here, and that rocks.

Danger of the Ooze gets a little slippery in some areas, though. The layout of the map can be confusing, as I found myself getting turned around a time or two when the way forward – heh – wasn't clear. Big backtracking sequences are sometimes forced upon you if you take a wrong turn, too, and go through a one-way door, for example, and find out too late that you're not allowed to directly retrace your steps.

Having access to all four Turtles from the start also seems like the wrong call to me. I think Radical Rescue got it right when it gave you just one brother and tasked you with saving the rest before they'd join the playable squad! This way everyone's guaranteed to have their favorite available from the first minute, though, so I understand this approach too.

The only real drawback to this game today is that it's stuck on the 3DS! At least, from the Nintendo point of view. It also had PS3 and Xbox 360 versions. The ship has sailed by now, I'm sure, but a Switch port would still be very welcome today! **– LUCAS**

8.5 DAVID

8.0 LUCAS

FAN GAME REVIEW

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Rescue-Palooza!

Did this fan game inspire Shredder's Revenge?

TRIBUTE GAMES IS just about ready to share their love of the TMNT with the world through the release of Shredder's Revenge, but they aren't the only ones paying tribute to the classic toon Turtles. A fan game maker named Merso X struck first, two years ago, with the launch of the free PC adventure Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Rescue-Palooza!

Merso X has been using his game development skills to honor his favorite childhood TV shows and movies for years now, as before tackling the Turtles he brought into the world the PC freeware of Super Karate Kid, Power Rangers: Beats of Power and Super ThunderCats. When he set out to make his own TMNT title, he originally just wanted to remaster the NES brawler duo of TMNT II: The Arcade Game and TMNT III: The Manhattan Project, giving those games a 16-bit look in the same way Super Mario All-Stars updated Mario's NES games.

Well, things must have gotten out of hand after that. Because while the core gameplay of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Rescue-Palooza! is clearly drawn from TMNT II and III on NES, the scope of the final game is wildly overblown way beyond the limits of those 8-bit classics.

The characters! The sheer volume of playable characters!

The story here is that Shredder, in honor of the 30th anniversary of his rivalry with the Turtles, has kidnapped each and every one of their friends and allies. Literally dozens of supporting characters – anyone who was ever nice to the heroes in any episode of the classic show – has been stolen away by the Foot Clan, and it's up to the Turtles to rescue and rescue and rescue some more. It's a Palooza of Rescuing! And every time you save a friend, they then become fully playable.

And not just the friends, either! Just about every boss you beat is also unlocked as a playable "hero" after their stage is cleared, such that you can storm the Technodrome using Bebop and Rocksteady, or the Triceratons, or Traag or Tora or Tempestra. They might be a little too powerful, though, so you could always choose to be Zach the Turtle fanboy, April's love-starved friend Irma or even Vernon. (Good for Vernon on already scoring a Shredder's Revenge appearance too!)

It's quantity over quality here. The enormity of the cast is counterbalanced by the inconsistency of their appearances – Merso X, for the most part, took existing sprites of most of these characters and recolored them, but didn't edit them beyond that. So you've NES-proportioned Turtles battling baddies pulled straight from the SNES Tournament Fighters game, then turning around after that and taking on challengers who've leapt straight out of Radical Rescue on Game Boy. It's jarring.

The levels are all a mish-mash as well, as you mostly get belt-scrolling brawler stages, but then there are some purely 2D levels taken out of the original TMNT NES game too. The level select map

pays homage to that earliest origin point as well, and lets you choose the order in which you play each level. Like a Mega Man game!

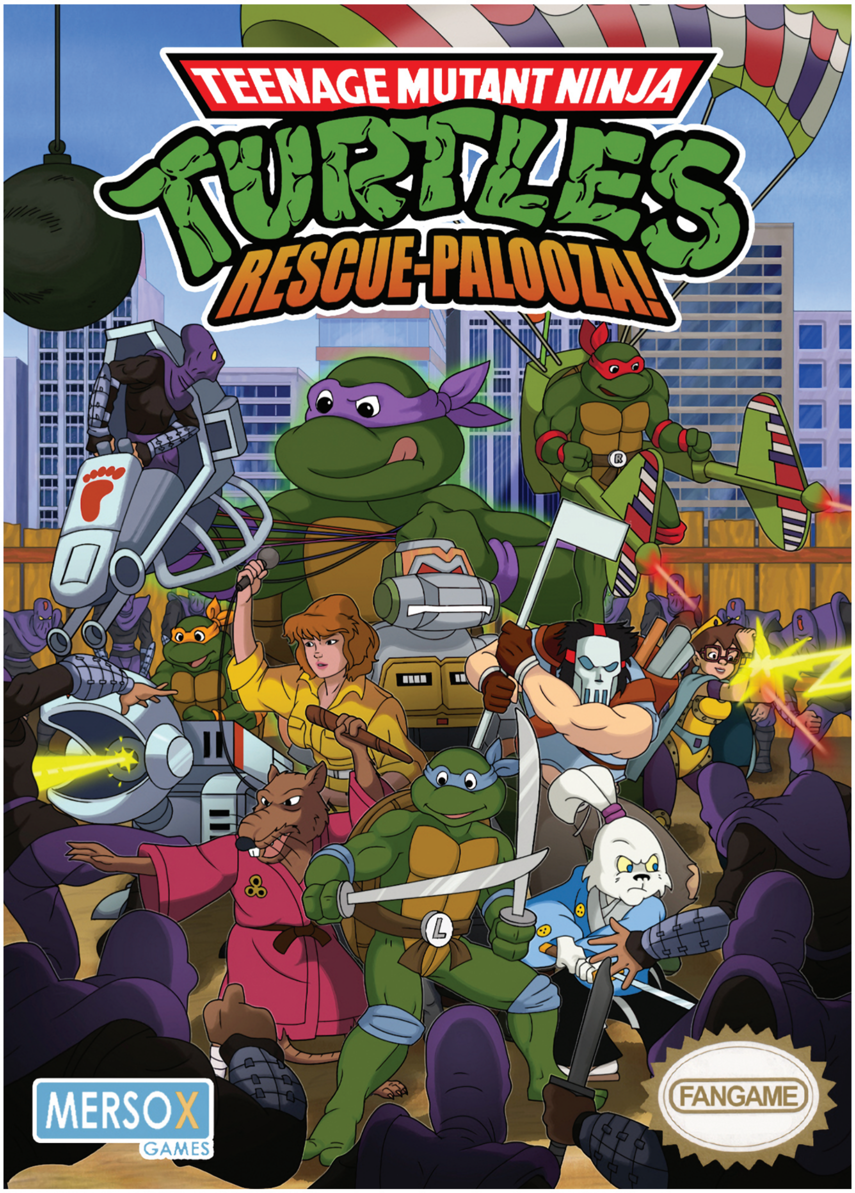
And then the Mega Man connection is solidified by directly aping the Dr. Wily's Castle screens near the end as you move through the Technodrome. And there's even a stage from The Adventures of Bayou Billy as well!

This is seriously an "everything and the kitchen sink" super-stuffed carnival of nostalgic Turtles chaos. It seems like every idea Merso X had while making it, he tossed in, with no filter whatsoever. It's quite a wild and overstimulating experience as a result.

And you know what? It works! Tribute Games would probably get raked over the coals if they went this overboard with Shredder's Revenge, as a higher level of focus and polish is demanded for a game bound for sale to customers. But Rescue-Palooza! being a totally free PC passion project means it doesn't have to be reined in, so it isn't. In any regard.

With nearly two hours of gameplay for just a first run and fully 60 different playable characters crammed in to multiply the replay value far beyond that, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Rescue-Palooza! is a wonderful way for you to tide yourself over until Shredder's Revenge arrives. And who knows? Since this game launched in 2019 and the Tribute devs were surely aware of it, it might very well have influenced the new game's creation. (Just don't count on 56 unlockable characters in that one!) — **LUCAS**

8.5



Merso-X.com

GAME PRESERVATION

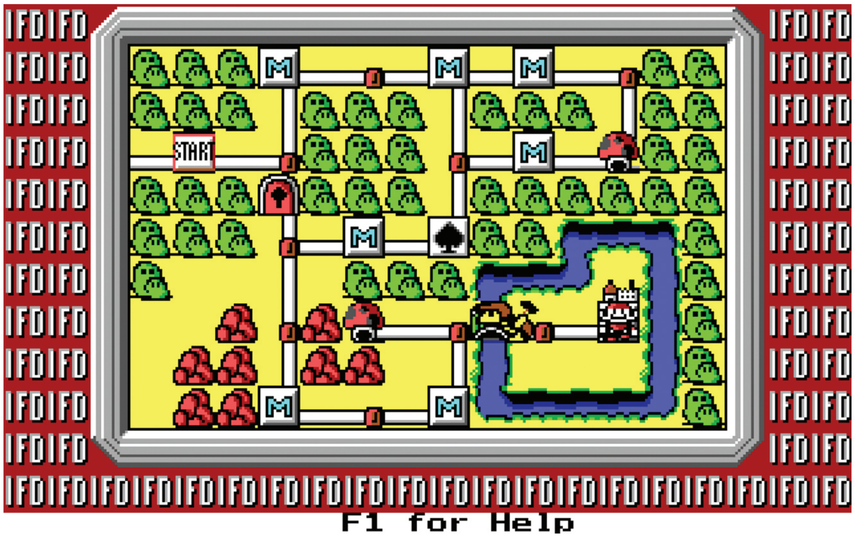
Super Mario Bros. 3 . . . For PC?

The legendary demo pitched to Nintendo has been donated to the Strong National Museum of Play.

NOWADAYS, THE IDEA of playing a Nintendo game on a PC is a bit far-fetched. The Big N has gone to great lengths to confine its games to its consoles, sitting atop them like a dragon upon its mighty hoard. Back in the '80s and '90s, they weren't quite as protective. We got some edutainment games like Mario is Missing and Mario's Time Machine, but none of their biggest hits. '90s PC kids had to get by with games like Mario Kart clone Wacky Wheels and Mario Bros. doppelgänger The Great Giana Sisters. If you wanted that Nintendo goodness, you needed to invest in a console.

But it couldn't hurt to try, right? That's what John Carmack, John Romero, Tom Hall and Lane Roathe thought in 1990 while working at Softdisk. Carmack discovered a way of implementing smooth screen scrolling within common PC constraints at the time, opening a lot of doors. He created a method called adaptive tile refresh, a complicated process that allowed for sidescrolling similar to what was on consoles at the time. It was quite a breakthrough that conserved computational power when it came to redrawing frames.

The team then hastily put together a proof-of-concept recreation of Super Mario Bros. 3 for MS-DOS under their group name, Ideas from the Deep. Bravely, they sent it to Nintendo . . . who politely told them that they didn't want their games on other platforms, and to please stop trying. The technology developed didn't go to waste, however.



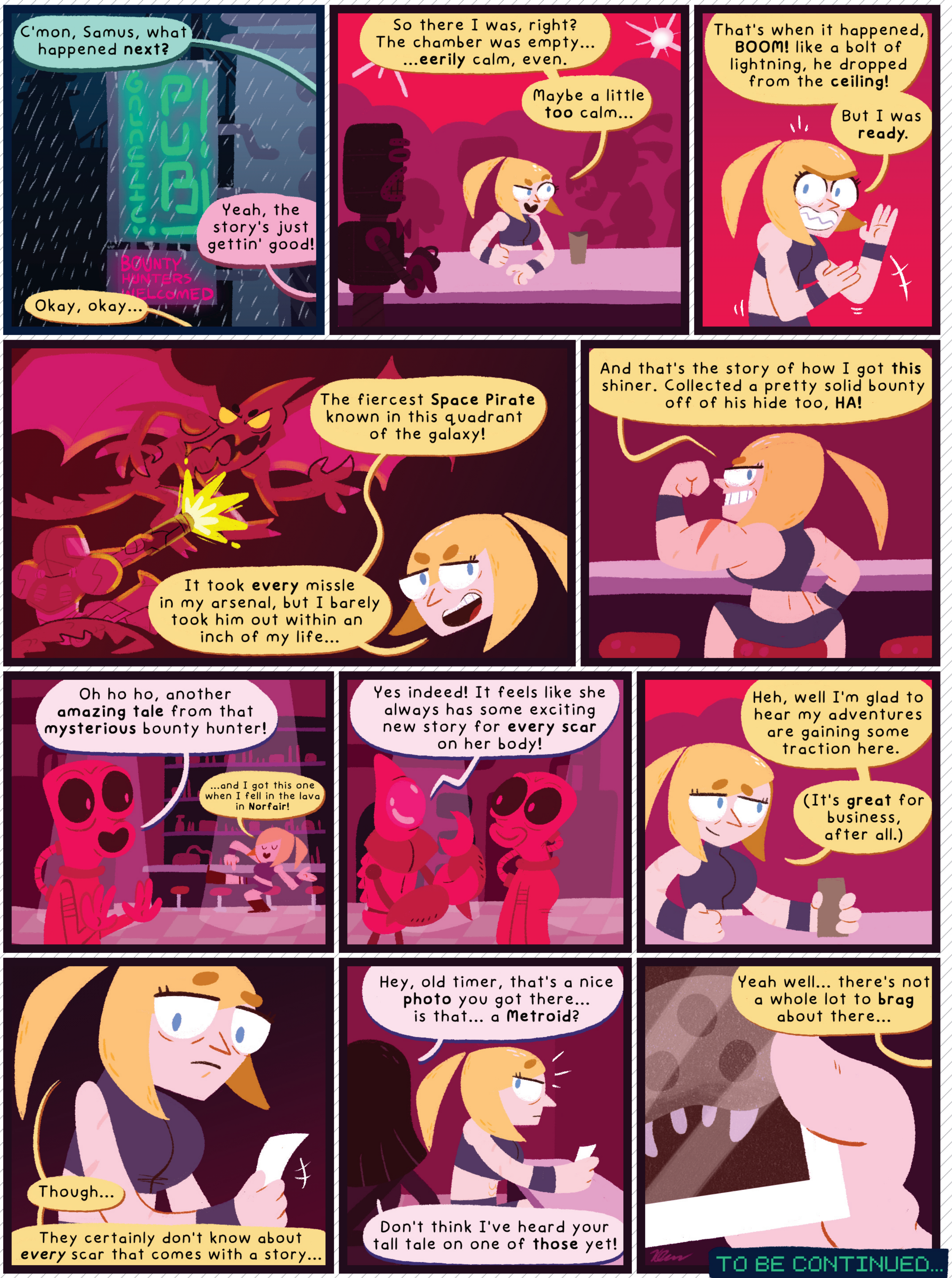
It was immediately implemented into their own original title, Commander Keen in Invasion of the Vorticons, which was a shareware hit. That game's success allowed the crew to create id Software and move on to bigger and better things. Those things being Wolfenstein 3D, DOOM and Quake, three franchises that continue strong to this day.

The demo that id created has largely been buried for 30 years, outside of a few glimpses of gameplay shared on various websites. However, a working copy has just been donated to the Strong Museum of Play as of July 2021, allowing it to be experienced by researchers.

Don't get too excited. The prototype was simply to convince Nintendo that such a game could be pulled off on DOS; it was never a finished product. The first level was recreated in its entirety, and the controls and mechanics were mostly functional. However, following that is just a bunch of short playgrounds that demonstrate four-directional scrolling and various tilesets. Sadly, we don't get to experience the first airship in the glorious EGA color palette, nor do any of the Koopalings appear.

Nonetheless, it's an important piece of history, as its creation unified the key figures of the legendary id Software. The company would go on to revolutionize the first-person shooter, writing the formula that would be used for many years after. What a weird thought that FPS games, as a whole, might not exist in their current state if it wasn't for Super Mario Bros. 3! It's certainly an interesting twist that the company that would dominate '90s shooters got its start with an earnest proposal to Nintendo. **— ZOEY**

MuseumOfPlay.org



BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

NEXT ISSUE

We're doing it again! Two years ago was the first time we split our annual September/October issue into back-to-back, separate September and October editions, mostly motivated by the release date of **Luigi's Mansion 3** literally being on Halloween day (so we just couldn't help but make a special Halloween-ish issue!). This time around, it's the surprise resurrection of the long-thought-dead **Metroid Dread** that's convinced us to craft our second October-only edition.

We'll present an in-depth pre-release preview of that continuation (and conclusion?) of the mainline Metroid series story, then shine the spotlight on some other spooky and shadowy new titles that are just over the horizon as well, like **Shin Megami Tensei V** and the maybe-even-darker-than-Majora's Mask **sequel to The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild.** So start keeping an eye on your mailbox sooner than you normally would . . . and look over your shoulder a time or two too, as you never know when E.M.M.I. will appear!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #55:

METROID DREAD

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD 2

AXIOM VERGE 2

NEO: **THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU**

YS IX: MONSTRUM NOX

STEEL ASSAULT

FATAL FRAME: MAIDEN OF BLACK WATER

MARIO PARTY SUPERSTARS

SPLATOON 3

NO MORE HEROES III

DAWN OF THE MONSTERS

SHADOWVERSE: CHAMPION'S BATTLE

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

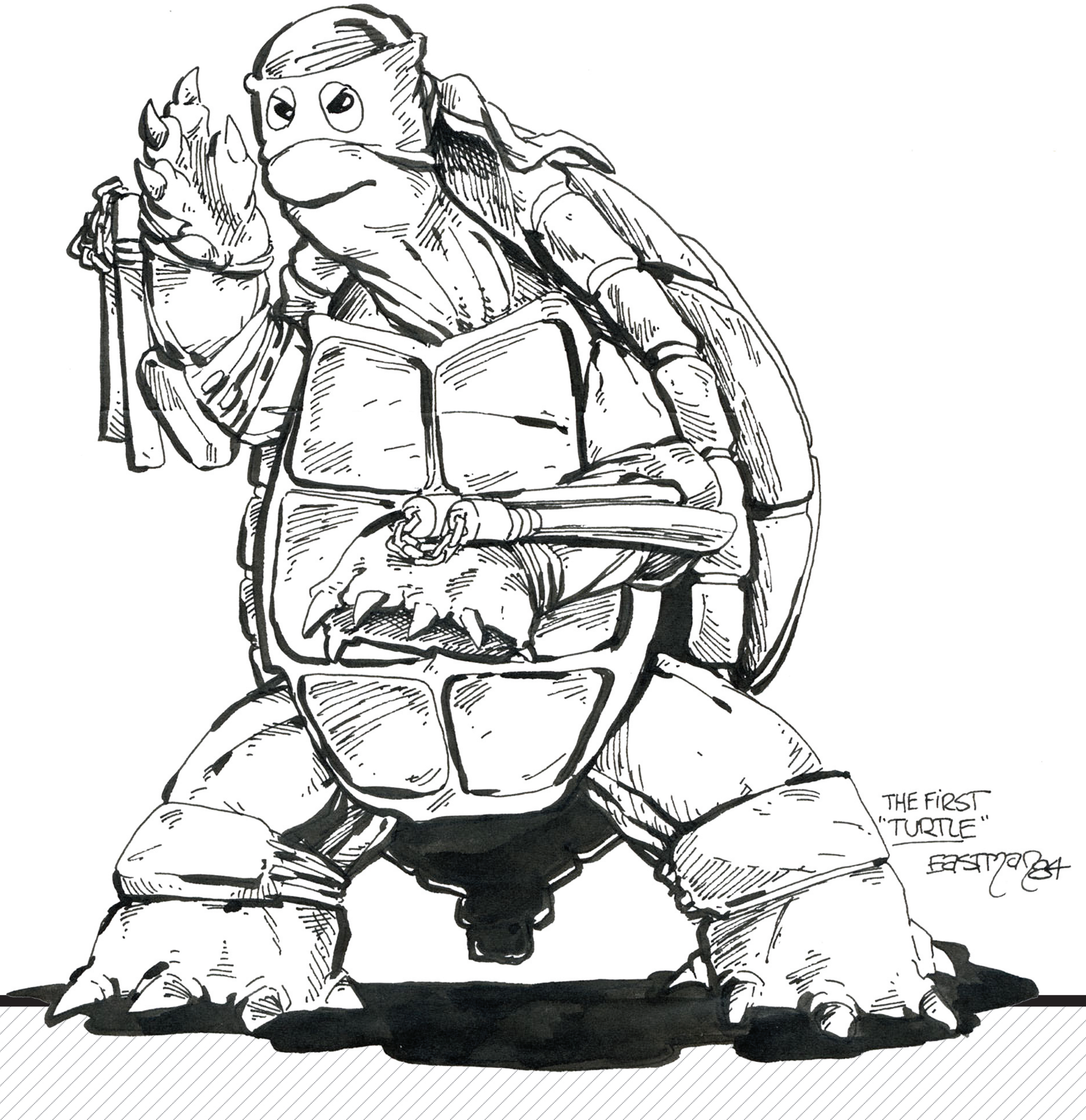
AND MUCH **MORE!**

OCTOBER 2021

THE FIRST TURTLE

IN EARLY 1984, comic collaborators Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird were hanging out one night, brainstorming ideas and sketching characters together while watching bad TV. A creative concept sparked in Kevin's mind, and he put pen to paper, crafting the drawing seen below. Laughing, he slid the paper over to Peter and said, "Look, it's a Ninja Turtle!" Peter loved the idea immediately, sketched his own version in response and suggested adding "Teenage Mutant" to the name as well. One domino after another fell after that, and nearly four decades later the cultural impact of that very first sketch has become immeasurable.

You and I may never end up creating a global phenomenon that spans comics, TV shows, movies and video games . . . but then again, Kevin and Peter never would have dreamed that their simple two-man comic jam on that fateful night in 1984 would turn out to be so important either. So sketch! Write! Create! Get your ideas out of your brain and into some form in which they can be shared — and encourage your loved ones, especially any kids in your life, to do the same! Somewhere out there the next Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is already taking shape in someone's subconscious. How totally radical would it be to bear witness to its birth? **— LUCAS**



PATREON.COM
/NINTENDOFORCE

/NINTENDOFORCE

WWW.
NFMAGAZINE.COM

/NFMAGAZINE

@NINTENDOFORCE